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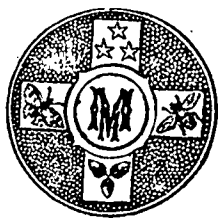
LECTURES ON POETRY

DOYLE



LECTURES

DELIVERED

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BY

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PREFACE.

In giving these Lectures to the world, I believe I am only taking a usual step, and one that is expected of Oxford Professors, more or less, by that University. I need only then ask my readers to bear in mind that they are lectures, to be heard, as ancient Pistol says, 'with ears'—not subtle disquisitions to be meditated upon in a quiet study. They have therefore been thrown into a key more rhetorical and familiar than I should otherwise have adopted, and are rather, to use Aristotle's phrase, epideictic orations than argumentative essays. I must add that for five-and-twenty years and more, I have done nothing as an orator, except to mumble now and then a few words, against my will, at a wedding breakfast. It follows that these compositions must be, in point of tone and style, necessarily tentative. Indeed, one reason for not putting off publication till a greater number of them had heaped themselves up, is, that the sooner any corrigible defects and mistakes are pointed out to me (and

I dare say I shall find critics obliging enough to meet my wishes in that respect), the less delay will there be, on my part, in reconsidering the whole subject, and in mending, so far as I can, the error of my ways.

INAUGURAL LECTURE.

LECTURE I.

INAUGURAL LECTURE.

WHEN any one steps into the place of a poet and critic such as Mr. Arnold, he naturally feels somewhat awkward in undertaking his new functions. 'If it had not been,' he fancies his hearers saying to themselves, 'for the inconvenient restrictions by which this Professorship is hampered, we might have kept, with all the tact and power superadded which arises out of a long experience, our man of genius. Now, however, he is forced, for us at least, into an unnecessary silence, in order that another may speak—another, who has, no doubt, much of his business yet to learn, and who, even when he has learnt it, is not likely to give out anything half so good as that to which his predecessor has accustomed us.'

And yet, perhaps, if we suppose the founder of this Chair to have been actuated, in limiting its tenure, by reason and not by caprice; there is something, even

though it may involve temporary failures and occasional disappointments, to be said for such a limitation. Criticism, to speak roughly, for I am not aiming at any logical division, is of two kinds—the criticism of knowledge, and the criticism of sympathy. The critics who know, of whom Aristotle may be taken as the type and representative, judge mainly by the intellect; and any great leader of that school, if he be, in his degree, worthy to follow in the steps of his master, throws, like the noon-day sun, a broad and equal illumination over all the departments of his subject alike. But as the lovelier tints of colouring, and the more pathetic lights, are due to those narrowing rays which fasten upon their own domain, so is there a criticism of the sympathies specially worth having, wherever those sympathies are specially interested. It therefore might be not unreasonably hoped, and not unwisely attempted, to accumulate the most delicate insights, and the liveliest sensibilities of different minds, so that, converging from opposite quarters, they should coalesce into a perfect whole. For an unbroken succession of Aristotles it is vain to hope. But thus, it might be possible to build up, limb by limb, a great body of doctrine—of doctrine, keen with that intensity, which the wide critic is apt to want, and

all-embracing in that width, which no passionate critic is likely to attain to, unless he be one of those rare men, whom the world waits for through centuries of expectation. In this manner it ought to result, that the poetry of thought and the poetry of passion—that which belongs to the present and that which is reflected from the past, that which is of home growth, and that which rises up among other habits of thought, and takes its shape from a different national character—should, in their turns, be adequately interpreted and discussed.

If this way of looking at the office of Poetry Professor, and at the objects which he has to set before himself, be, under ordinary circumstances I mean, a right and convenient one, he should, I think, take the earliest opportunity (as I hope to do on the present occasion) of opening himself frankly and freely to his audience. It seems to me therefore desirable, before I enter into any details of criticism, before I praise one poet or disparage another, that my general view as to the nature of the poetical imagination, as to its uses and its dangers, as to the manner in which it acts for itself, and reacts upon the character at large, should be known to those for whom such criticisms of detail are intended. All this I believe to be

desirable, not only for you who hear, but also for me who speak. These questions go so deep into the roots of life, they have been so often disputed about, and still remain so incompletely solved, that I, for one, am not going to dogmatize thereon. I can but state plainly, and without affectation, what I think and feel. I can but promise that, being at least as anxious to learn as I am willing to teach, the objections which will rise up against any theories of mine, as they have risen up against the theories of men to whom I should not dream of comparing myself, shall be examined (if I know my own mind) with an attention unvexed by prejudice, and only eager for the truth.

So complete, indeed, is the discordance of sentiment, as to all these matters, between rival instructors, who alike claim the highest authority, that even before entering upon the actual subject of this address, I have to go a step back, and to fight, as it seems, for my very existence here, by undertaking the defence of Poetry itself. Against whom you will say, *Quis vituperavit?* Ay, that is the question; not against men up to their necks in business—stockbrokers, bankers, and the like—not against the family of that typical clerk—

'Foredoomed his father's soul to cross,
Who pens a stanza when he should engross,'

but against writers of the highest genius, who could, as far as we can judge, equip, out of their rich and powerful imaginations, an ordinary poet or so, without much feeling the loss. Against such high authorities, in a word, as Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Ruskin. I am not clear at this moment whether Mr. Carlyle has ever put his hatred of verse-making on record, in any formal shape; but it may be gathered from any one of his writings. Everybody knows how he confides, at uncertain intervals, to the eternities and immensities—his bitter regret, that men of noble faculties, like Tennyson and Browning, should have become entangled, under some evil star, in the meshes of rhyme, instead of devoting themselves to —I do not exactly know what—but to something or anything else. Mr. Ruskin, however, in one of his most characteristic passages, announces himself to the universe as admitting but two orders of poets. Both of these, according to him, must be first-rate in their range, though their range be different, and with poetry second-rate in quality no one ought to be allowed to trouble mankind. 'There is quite enough of the best,' says he, 'much more than we can read or enjoy,

in the length of a single life, and it is a literal wrong or sin to encumber us with inferior work.' 'I have no patience,' he now proceeds (by way of encouraging and inspiring the bards of the future), 'with the apologies made by young pseudo-poets, that they believe that there is some good in what they have written; some good—if there is not all good, there is no good. If they ever hoped to do better, why do they trouble us now?' If these views were correct, the first thing to strike me in this place, would be that a conscientious Poetry Professor must have a dreadful time of it. His mission he must look upon as wholly negative; his motto could only be, 'Prevention is better than cure.' His duty would summon him to rise up early and late take rest, to run hither and thither, saying to this undergraduate, 'Writing for the Newdegate? Have you no principles?' To that bachelor of arts, 'What! at your age contending for the triennial Religious Poem? Do you not know that you are guilty of a literal sin?' He must consider himself, in short, elected for the purpose of proctorizing generally the haunts of song, and of hunting up meditated stanzas, in the act of concoction, like an Irish exciseman on the track of an illicit still.

Happily for me, I do not feel bound to incur any

such onerous responsibilities. I differ entirely from every one of the sentences quoted above, and the very last position, which I should think of taking up, would be that of a critical Canute, who plants his foot upon the brink of the advancing age, and says to the rising tide of genius, as it rolls shoreward under an irresistible impulse from within, 'You know you should not come here.'

I have said that Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Ruskin are possessed of rich, I might have added of almost inexhaustible, imaginations; I suspect, however—and it makes them all the greater if I am right in my conjecture—that for neither of their minds is it absolutely the dominant or master faculty. Now I think we shall find, that whenever this is the case, whenever other gifts and talents (equally admirable, perhaps,) have the power, and, indeed, in some sort, the right to struggle against the rule of the formative imagination, the result is not a genuine poet, at least not a genuine poet of the normal type; but a thinker, or a rhetorician, or a critic in verse. One test of this I believe to be, that when such a man has recourse to poetry, that he may embody and communicate what he thinks and feels; he finds himself moving, no matter with what degree of vigour and energy, in

an element which is not his most natural one; his thoughts do not flow as freely as they should; his metaphors do not kindle and rush upon him with their usual affluence and splendour. He differs, in short, from the real singers by this, that for him the pressure of rhythm and the law of measured words weighs down like a fetter, instead of uplifting as a wing. Hence a certain distrust of poetry itself; hence, unconsciously, I dare say, something like a contemptuous bitterness against smaller men, who, amid the stumbling-blocks and intricacies which have half baffled their superiors, go twittering about, more comfortable, and more at home, than, in the opinion of the giants, they have any business to be.

Setting, however, all this aside, and taking Mr. Ruskin's utterances for what they are worth, without attempting to explain their origin, let us examine them in turn, and endeavour to ascertain their real value.

First, Mr. Ruskin admits only two orders of poets. Of the higher order, he names Homer, Dante, Shakespeare; of the lower, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Keats. Nothing can be better; but how is he to get his chosen ones? It seems to me that what he desires is to gather the perfect fruit without any blossoms competing beforehand; without any previous rise or

struggle of the sap. He may have been somehow or other clothed by Apollo with a special mission to move about among undeveloped rhymesters, and to pronounce at once, by the help of some diviner instinct, 'This poet-grub is a pseudo-grub, be careful that his wings are cut hereafter. This one again is of royal spirit, let him be put into a royal cell; feed him upon honey-dew; make him drink the milk of Paradise, and train him up, without any disturbance from importunate rivals, into a bard proper.' But unless something of this kind can be done (as bees in a difficulty, under the impulse of their unerring instinct, fix upon the very one they want, out of a multitude of seemingly undistinguishable little creatures, and feed it up into an unexceptionable queen), we must, I fear, be content to take our poets as they arise, according to the methods in which nature usually supplies them.

Now, we all know the story of Brummel's valet coming down-stairs with an unshapely mass of crumpled neck-cloths under his arm; and how, on being asked what on earth he was about? he replied, not without a tincture of becoming pride, 'These are our failures.' Meanwhile, the successful tie above was, I may say, the poet of muslin, a consummation and a flower which had emerged out of some thirty dishevelled existences.

Or, to take another illustration, if you go into a china manufactory, you may see the workman carefully shaping, out of the same raw material, bowls, and jugs, and vases, but the form of this one is not perfect, the paste of that other is too thin to stand the trial of fire. But come, here is a third; surely that will do? No, not quite yet. There is a half imperceptible flaw somewhere, which renders it unfit to bear the required stress and strain. And thus they are all of them mercilessly kneaded up again into chaos, till the eye and hand of the artist have taught themselves to work in harmony together, and the structure, sufficient at last, receives that delicate texture, and imbibes those glowing colours, which often last on without a blemish, when bulkier and stronger, and apparently more important, productions have rotted, or crumbled, or rusted into ruin. I recollect standing at Worcester long ago, amid work that was thus going on, and saying to myself, in rather a melancholy mood, 'This is the way in which Nature gets her poets. She has to maltreat rather savagely a great deal of very respectable clay in the process, but I make no doubt that the clay, sooner or later, finds its proper place in some other condition: and, after all, THE POET IS THERE.'

Of course I must not be taken as meaning seriously

to say that this is the actual method according to which illustrious men are compounded and turned out of the laboratory of Nature. What I do mean is, I trust, sufficiently obvious, the rather that it has often enough been insisted on before—I mean that they belong to their time and are but specimens selected out of a multitude which clusters around them. A thousand influences cooperate with, a thousand accidents combine to impress each original mind, and nearly the same influences cooperate with, and nearly the same accidents combine to impress myriads of other minds and other temperaments, separated from the nobler ones by narrower or broader lines of demarcation. I hope I may say it without irreverence, 'they that run in the race run all, but one only receiveth the prize.' Mr. Ruskin would forbid the race. Is he sure that, having done so, he could always secure the prize for the most deserving? The very great are apt sometimes in youth to outgrow their strength, to exhibit more of struggle and contortion and awkwardness than some symmetrical rival, who is a better master of his genius, because his genius was never born to rise so high, and therefore never strives and ferments with such irregular and intermitting power. All this, however, has been brought home to the feelings and common-

sense of mankind by the world-famous story of the Ugly Duck, so that I need not enlarge upon the subject. I will content myself with reminding Mr. Ruskin, that even if he could succeed in establishing his prohibitory decrees, and in beating down free-trade so far as poetry is concerned, he might still find himself self-baffled in the end, by the defeat of his own object, and the suppression of his own swan.

The second proposition to which Mr. Ruskin demands our assent is this: that as there is more first-rate poetry than can be read or enjoyed in the length of a single life, the attention of the world ought to be concentrated upon that, and the lyres of all meaner minstrels impounded at once, as you take away a gun from a poacher. Whether this be quite the case, unless he include in his *corpus poetarum* that huge Calmuck Epic, of which every polite person among the Calmucks is expected to know by heart forty-eight books, at least, out of the three or four hundred which lie open to his memory, I do not think it necessary to inquire, because it is wholly irrelevant to the matter in hand. He himself has told us, elsewhere, with his usual eloquence, that the artist (and it really matters not a jot whether such artist be poet, painter, sculptor, or musician) becomes great, and earns his

glory, by being the man of men, the contemporary among contemporaries in his own day. He embodies their aspirations, he interprets their vague yearnings, he soothes their sorrows, he gives a voice to the dumb struggle of their passions, he lives, as they do, in the life of the present, instead of striving to create a future as yet unfelt by them, or to reawaken a past which they have forgotten. Now the complicated influences, which act upon our own time, may be less noble and less fruitful than those which acted upon the fellow-citizens of Dante or of Shakespeare, but still they have a nobility which belongs to themselves, and are entitled to bear their own natural fruit. This again brings us back to what I said before, that we must get our poets as we can, according to the methods which nature is determined to employ.

There is a dismal theory of the universe, that all the uncountable suns throughout space are smouldering down, gradually, but surely, into one perpetual night. More cheerful astronomers, however, are to be found, who encourage a hope that this is not altogether so; that what seems to us a void, is filled everywhere with dormant seeds of being—with, as it were, a diffused and impalpable vapour of heat and light and energy. So that everywhere, the great

stars perish not, but are endowed with mysterious powers for drawing forth, and condensing, and assimilating to their own essence, the spirit of universal life which lies floating around them wherever they go; and for repairing, in this manner, the overflowings of incessant waste, from fountains of everlasting renovation. To this movement (if there be such a movement) of the heavens through space, we can perhaps liken the progress of Poetry through Time. At one season it may rejoice as a giant to run its course, in harmony with noble materials of inspiration, and with the heart of some great age; at another, it may have to toil across poorer and thinner regions of thought. But always, whether the element in which it moves be rich or poor, it is driven, by the law of its existence, to get as much life as it can for itself out of the surrounding atmosphere, or else to starve and die.

It is therefore idle to talk of the great writers of old, as being enough for the world, and that without any addition to their numbers. Men of mature age may return to them with delight, and interest themselves by observing how and where the poets who enchanted their boyhood approach to, and how and where they fall short of these, the acknowledged masters of their

common art. But there is a yearning instinct in the youth of each generation, the mother, I believe, of all true poetry, which seeks ever to find in the songs which it loves and dwells upon, the reflection of its own passions and the echo of its own thoughts. In proportion as those passions are worth reflecting, and those thoughts are worth echoing, in that proportion, I apprehend, does the poetry of any particular time or country establish itself among the lasting possessions of mankind; but whether it be ephemeral or whether it be immortal, *have it you must.*

We now come to the remarkable dictum that unless the poetry of any poet be all good, it is none of it good. Surely this is a hard saying, and the lantern of Diogenes must be put into requisition, if we hope to find a writer of verses who is fit to live. Is all Shakespeare good? is all Homer good? is all Dante good? He must be an unflinching partizan who could answer these questions in the affirmative. Even, however, if we put aside such Di Majores, as soaring, in a region of their own, beyond the reach of criticism, I, for one, am not prepared to give up Lochiel and the Battle of the Baltic, the Last Man, and O'Connor's Child, and the Mariners of England, and some twenty other of Campbell's odes, because he wrote much

hardly above mediocrity, and not a little which is hopelessly below par. I am not prepared to blot out the story of Margaret, and Lucy Gray, and Tintern Abbey, and the countless exquisite compositions which must occur to all who hear me, because Wordsworth was once ill-inspired enough to write, in honour of the Border damsel who saved her lover by the sacrifice of her own life, some flat, poor stanzas, which begin thus—

'Sweet Ellen Irwin, when she sat
Upon the braes of Kirtle,
Was lovely as a Grecian maid
Adorned with wreaths of myrtle.'

And that on Scottish ground, too, and with the passionate music of the old lyrical cry ringing in his ears—

'I wish I were where Helen lies;
Night and day on me she cries;
Oh that I were where Helen lies,
On fair Kirkonnel lea.

Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
And curst the hand that fired the shot,
When in my arms Burd Helen dropt,
And died to rescue me.

Oh, think na ye my heart was sair,
When my love dropt down and spak nae mair;
I laid her down wi' mickle care
On fair Kirkonnel lea.

As I went down the water side,
None but my foe to be my guide,
None but my foe to be my guide,
On fair Kirkonnel lea,
I lighted down my sword to draw,
I hacked him in pieces sma',
On fair Kirkonnel lea.

I would my grave were growing green,
A winding-sheet drawn o'er my e'en,
And I in Helen's arms were lying
On fair Kirkonnel lea.

I wish I were where Helen lies;
Night and day on me she cries;
And I am weary of the skies
Since my love died for me.'

Now it may be said that I am dissecting words somewhat captiously: this might be so, if I thought Mr. Ruskin any nearer the truth in the spirit of these criticisms, than he is in the letter of them. As to their form, that, no doubt, is comparatively unimportant.

When he says that poetry not first-rate adds altogether to human weariness, in a most uncomfortable manner, I may imagine that I catch the tones of a famous voice, whose natural accent is a Scottish one—a voice which belongs not so much to Mr. Ruskin as to an elder if not a better dogmatizer. I may think that even if Mr. Ruskin be the appointed heir of our well-known Chelsea Elijah, it might have

been more discreet to wait, before wrapping himself in the familiar mantle, until the prophet in possession had let it drop. But I am quite willing to acknowledge that a man may state his case crudely and violently, and yet be right in the main. Can we say this, however, in the present instance? Honestly, I think not. After all, people must be educated, or must educate themselves, through the capacities they have, and not through those which they have not. Accordingly, one boy cannot write a letter to a schoolfellow without scribbling horses, and huntsmen, and little wiry terriers, all over the paper; another steals down in the grey of the morning, with his nightgown still on, to pick out tunes upon the pianoforte before it is wanted for those inevitable scales; a third, in my day, used to know Marmion and the Bride of Abydos, now he knows the Idylls of the King by heart, and delights himself with flabby imitations of Tennyson, or Byron, or Scott. Now, if you say to the first of these lads, 'You will never become a Raphael or a Titian, and therefore never let me hear of your touching a pencil again;' to the second, 'Do you suppose you can hereafter rival Beethoven or Mozart? keep therefore away from the pianoforte, or consequences which I should deplore will be the result;'

and to the third, 'You are not a Shakespeare—no, nor even a Tennyson—therefore, if ever you stumble on a rhyme again, you must instantly be flogged;' you would, in my opinion, be going altogether the wrong way to work. Instead of clearing the mind, as you intend, for the ordinary purposes of life, you only sour the temper and darken the understanding with the dust and smoke of an extinguished faculty.

Leave, then, the young verse-makers alone; some of them, not always those whose apparent promise first meets the eye, are about to stand forth as the genuine poets of the on-coming time. In others, the impulse will gradually wear itself out, but not until it has imparted to the intellect a certain elasticity and glow of colour, which tends to heighten its attractiveness, and to increase its general power. But there is a third class, not usually of great importance, members of which, nevertheless, are lifted every now and then by the force of circumstances, and under the pressure of awakened passion, out of and above themselves; so that we get high poetry from men who are not really high poets, and owe more than one of those

> 'Jewels, five words long,
> That on the stretched forefinger of old Time
> Sparkle for ever——'

to writers, either wholly unknown, or at least comparatively obscure. For instance, what have we to do with Colonel Lovelace? He was a gallant soldier, without question, famous for personal beauty among his contemporaries, able, popular, and accomplished; but so were many others then, who are now totally forgotten. If the times had been smooth, he would have gone on glittering at the Court of Charles I, and polishing up his love ditties, till he got tired of that work, with very little interest for us. But the times were not smooth. Civil war swept down as a sword, cutting family ties and old affections asunder. Then came the partings, 'such as press the life out from young hearts'—the despairing appeals from sisters and sweethearts and mothers and wives, encountered with a resistance equally despairing on the part of brothers and lovers and husbands and sons. And I say that the spirit of England is stronger, and the literature of England richer even unto this day, because Colonel Lovelace was able to stand forth, for Puritan and Loyalist alike, out of the multitude of gentlemen and men of honour — to stand forth and fix in living words that answer to such appeals, which has to be given by all true men, and accepted by all true women, as implacable and final for evermore:—

'Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field,
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou, too, shalt adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.'

A manly sentiment indeed, certain to live on with the English language in its own manly words—words not unworthy to rank close up with that first great utterance of unselfish public duty, which yet speaks to the soul of man across the silence of three thousand years—

εἷς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος, ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης.

But observe, if Colonel Lovelace's verse-making tendencies had been sternly repressed, this poem would never have seen the light. He is rather a voluminous author, and wrote a good deal, which nobody reads or is likely to read now; but he learnt thereby to use language as a tool, and to put his thoughts into shape. Had he not cultivated poetry as an art, before it seized upon him as an inspiration, the feeling would have been there for him, as it was there for many others

who gave it no permanent expression; but it must have fallen back like a broken wave into the depths of his own heart, and the literature of England would have been all the poorer by the absence of one of its poetical gems.

Up to this point I hope that we have gone on together. We all, I hope, agree in thinking, first, that the course of poetry cannot be stopped by proscribing future poets; secondly, that however desirable it might be to have none but great writers, we cannot get these except by a process of natural selection out of the crowd of smaller men; and that, thirdly, each successive age will, without dethroning older potentates, possess itself of its own sworn interpreters and guides. Therefore it was that the tribes of Hellas, amid the petty cares and struggles of a duller age, yearned to hear of those heroic days, when their forefathers, led on by children of the gods, established for ever the distinction between the barbarian and the Hellene. Accordingly the songs of Homer, which this yearning of theirs had half created, were received at feast and game with unfading enthusiasm, whereas recitations from the philosophical poetry of Wordsworth would have fallen idly and without music on their ears. Therefore the patriarchs of Arabia, smitten by their overwhelming

sense of the personality of God, and the utter nothingness of men, bowed down before the glorious inspiration of Job, with hearts which echoed every word of it back. But the wide and tolerant gentleness of Shakespeare they would probably have resented as a personal affront.

Different, however, as are the forms which at different times poetry has put on, they seem for the most part to be derived from a single source—that dissatisfaction, I mean, with what is present and close at hand, which is one of Nature's silent promises to the heart, one stimulus to the advancement of our race, one evidence of the abiding greatness of man. Even when the poet plunges headlong into lower elements, and prostitutes his genius by investing frivolous pleasures or animal passions with his draperies of beauty and grace, it is but an angry recoil from the pressure of the Infinite—the 'desire of the moth for the star,' driven back upon itself, and maddened by its bitter disappointment. The imagination, indeed, not confined to poetry, but under the name of Hope, 'as broad and general as the casing air,' has well been called by some old writer—Simonides, I think—the nurse of life. But who this nurse of life actually is, and what her exact position with reference to the mental faculties

may be, is quite another question. A great deal has been thought and published upon the subject, by men eminent in different degrees, and at different times. They have, however, hitherto failed to land us in any definite conclusion.

Now, the first point to lay down, in order that we may escape from the mystification of mere words, seems to be that we must distinctly recognise as a fact that everybody possesses some imagination. We call one man imaginative as we call another muscular; not meaning thereby that weaker persons are without the same muscles, but only that they do not impress us with a special sense of their existence. I say this, however, with some doubt, and as it were tentatively, because there are critics of high authority who, when they speak of the imagination, connecting it with such names as Homer, Dante, or Shakespeare, speak of it in terms which might lead us to suppose that they look upon it as a separate faculty, by no means to be found, even as a germ, in average human creatures, but reserved for the peculiar favourites of Heaven. Just as the power of Samson, if I may follow up the analogy glanced at above, was infused into him, and him alone, by a Divine influence from on high, whilst that of Hercules, however gigantic, was the same

in kind as the power of other men, 'diffused and manacled in joint and limb, and founded on the brittle strength of bones.' Now this view of theirs may be the right one. The larger cannot of course be comprehended by the smaller, and we know that there are shades of emotion rising up in many minds, quite naturally, which are wholly unintelligible to the rest of mankind. For instance, there is that strange state of feeling which seems to itself to recognise as familiar, places, persons, and expressions never seen or heard before. Upon some this weighs with such persistency and vividness of impression, that its absence from the souls of others surprises and bewilders them, whilst to those who have it not, the assertion of its existence is met by half-incredulous astonishment; so much so that we might almost fancy that the former, according to Plato's theory, were in the middle of their preordained transfigurations, whilst the latter were only entering upon their earliest phase of life. In like manner, the higher imagination may be some such peculiarity, only rarer in its manifestations, and belonging to the intellectual, rather than to the emotional side of human character. I can only say that, as at present advised, I can see no reason for supposing so. But if it be, it would seem hopeless, even for the possessors thereof, to

analyse, and explain to the world of common sense, the nature of their incommunicable faculty. Voltaire's inhabitants of Saturn and Sirius, with their seventy-two and their thousand senses respectively, might as well attempt to make clear to the earth-born pigmy, whom they pitied as they talked, the secret of their complicated organisations. If, then, we are to examine this question at all, we must assume that it is within the ordinary jurisdiction of mankind, and take for granted, at present at least, that, vast as may be the difference between one imagination and another, it is still but a difference in degree, and not in kind.

There is, however, a new and original hypothesis, which it would be wrong to pass over in silence: that hypothesis, I mean, which has been advocated by Mr. Dallas, in his essay on 'The Gay Science,' with great ingenuity and zeal. He has done good service to all who busy themselves with investigation of mental phenomenon, by accumulating and discussing a number of recorded instances, in which the intellect is known to have worked, for the most part unconsciously, at times when the bodily frame was laid asleep. In this state it produces out of that work results sometimes natural to the producing mind, as when Coleridge, in an opium dream, created Kubla Khan; or as when a

lawyer, with his eyes shut, in the middle of the night, builds up an elaborate opinion on some point of law; but in other cases, again, other results wholly foreign to it and unexpected, as when persons, ignorant of music whilst awake, pour out in sleep their unremembered strains, imitating with accuracy and skill certain melodies which have, somehow or other, forced themselves in upon a latent sensibility of the brain. This latent sensibility, when thus called into action, Mr. Dallas describes as 'the hidden soul,' and identifies it with the creative imagination. Since his book, which promises to be an interesting and a valuable one, is but half completed, it would be premature to condemn this theory, which may be reinforced by fresh arguments and additional explanations. But I must frankly confess that I do not understand it now. I do not see how the great works which are meditated and wrought out in full day-light, with a perfect consciousness both of the means employed and of the ends they are directed to accomplish, can be referred to the hidden soul. Nor, again, do I perceive in what manner the organised memory and methodical arrangement of facts, by the help of which a barrister grapples with his point of law, whether he grapples with it at his chambers or on his bed, can be ranked under the faculty

of the imagination. Nay, it appears to me, as far as I can judge, that the hidden soul, which no doubt, for most men (Mr. Dallas, I think, has established that position), is more active than they could readily believe, executes its labours very much as the unhidden soul executes hers, at other times. I do not think it unlikely that some here, when boys at a public school, may have done Latin verses in a dream. I have, I know, more than once; though I never could remember anything higher up than the last two. But they, and I suppose their predecessors, were framed without any mysterious agency at all—they were framed by the same soul precisely, whatever that may be, which is set apart for the manufacture of fifth-form longs and shorts in an ordinary after twelve; nor could I ever discover that they were appreciably better, or appreciably worse, than if I had hammered them out upon the normal quarter of paper, whilst sitting at an orthodox desk. I settled the matter for myself in a careless sort of way, by supposing that different portions of the brain were unequally asleep, and that those portions nearest to wakefulness might exercise their energies, more or less, without breaking that bond which was yet enchaining the senses and the limbs. Nor does it seem to me that the accidental circum-

stance of my remembering how I was engaged, instead of, as is perhaps more frequently the case, forgetting it altogether, can in any way affect the character of the mental operation itself.* At the same time, I readily admit that Mr. Dallas is an earnest student on all such subjects, and a conscientious thinker; I therefore wait with some impatience to hear if he has anything to add to his mental speculations. Meanwhile, I adhere to Shakespeare's much simpler creed that,—

* The last time when this happened to me (not very many years ago) may be worth record, as illustrating the instantaneous effects of a change in the mental attitude during sleep. I found myself one morning at Mrs. Holt's again, bent over the well-remembered wooden desk, and writing verses, for which my tutor was waiting, upon Spring. I got on smoothly enough till I came to this couplet,—

'Emicat omnis ager renovato flore rosarum,
Et passim herbosâ nube virescit humus.'

Here my critical faculty came into play, I doubted about 'herbosa nubes,' but so completely was I the Eton boy once more that I put the doubt aside by saying, 'Oh, I think it will do, and if my tutor does not like it, he may alter it, and be hanged to him' (an improper speech of Philip asleep, for which Philip awake begs pardon of the excellent Provost of King's); but the little shift of thought, involved in this, woke me instantly with the two lines in question on my lips. The preceding ones had drifted irrecoverably (without, I fancy, leaving the world much poorer) into the abyss of space; if no such hitch had occurred, my belief is that I should have roused myself, at my usual hour, without any memory of the transaction at all.

'As imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.'

From this point of view, the first constituent element of the imagination seems to be a particular form of memory, which presents its facts in groups, with all their attendant circumstances and details retraced to the life. It stretches out, as it were, into a spiritual gallery, holding and exhibiting a long series of pictures gathered from the past; one man recollects that such a thing has happened, another exactly how it happened, and this last kind of recollection is, no doubt, one of the main foundations on which the imagination has to rest. If we join to this a power of unlimited combination—out of all the contents of such a gallery, a power, as Shakespeare calls it, of bodying forth from the endless variety of things known, the forms of things unknown, and of turning them, by the help of language, into shapes—we have before us, I think, the imaginative faculty in the rough. I do not, however, say that he who possesses, or is possessed by such a faculty, is therefore a poet. I understand that mathematicians require a high degree of it to deal, for instance, with the dimensions and configurations of space, and probably with other parts of their science.

There is also the musical imagination, of which I am not qualified to speak; but, as far as my observation extends, music is more akin to mathematics than to poetry.

The radical difference, however, which separates the poetical imagination proper from other forms of the same faculty—from those, at least, which deal with articulate words, is that it is essentially and above all things suggestive. A mathematician may have to conceive the starry life and desert chasms of the universe by a mental gift, such as that which Dante put forth to drag before the inner eye his maps and ground-plans of hell; but when he comes to communicate the result of these far-stretching speculations, he has to unwind his story, link by link, and to pause at every step. The rhetorician may clothe what he has to say in purple and fine linen. He may dazzle all around him by the splendour of his diction; but still the object and duty of his art is to unfold and enlarge upon, and to hammer in, by repeated strokes, what he wishes to impress upon his audience. He leaves as little as possible to be supplied from within by any mental action of theirs; and the reason is clear, namely, that as the particular business of eloquence is to hurry the listener along with the speaker, any one

who stops to feel his own feelings, and to think his own thoughts, becomes entangled in them, and is left behind. But the poet, on the other hand, is contented to touch a chord, which then vibrates at will, as its own sensitiveness may dictate; and according to the number and intensity of the vibrations awakened, legitimately awakened I mean, is the poetical power shown.

The poet, of course, ought also to be an artist, and must not overdo his work, or overstrain the attention of his readers; so that passages of repose, and mixed passages of rhetoric and poetry, or of thought and poetry, are often well and wisely introduced into any considerable work; but they do not, so far as it is a poem, constitute its essence. So, again, the rhetorician, when the ears of his crowd are caught, and their hearts are hot within them, may often heighten the effect of his appeals by a rapid flash of poetry; but any speaker who, instead of expatiating upon topic after topic as they arise in their order, should flit quickly from one delicate suggestion to another, after the manner of a poet, as an orator would be certain to fail. To illustrate what I mean, let us take two well-known passages from Jeremy Taylor. I choose a prose writer to quote from, because the naked limbs, *disjecti poetæ*,

are easier to operate upon in the way of anatomy. Every one knows the famous paragraph in which he compares the swift passage from youth to age, and from life to death, with the opening, the blooming, and the fading of a flower:—'But so I have seen a rose newly springing from the clefts of its hood, and at first it was fair and full with the dew of heaven as a lamb's fleece; but when a ruder breath forced upon its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darkness, and to decline to softness and the symptoms of a sickly age, till at night, having lost some of its leaves and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and worn-out faces.' Now the thought here is obvious enough, not to say commonplace. The comparison of the life of man to the flowers of the field can hardly have been an original simile much later than the age of Jubal. The whole beauty of the passage, a rhetorical beauty, consists in the exquisite accumulation of details, which must drive the meaning of this well-known metaphor home to the sense of the dullest peasant, and force him to acknowledge that the likeness is a real one. But, again, let us take this other sentence:—'I have read of a fair young German gentleman, who, living, often refused to be painted, but put off the importunity of his friends

by giving way that, after a few days' burial, they might send a painter to his vault, and if they saw cause for it, draw the image of his death to the life.' The Bishop then proceeds to enumerate, rhetorically, the ghastly circumstances of that condition, but he concludes, and, as it were, locks his sentences together by a touch of the purest poetry, and 'so he stands painted among his armed ancestors!' His armed ancestors! That single word, that short epithet, builds up for us in an instant a feudal castle, frowning with all its towers above the Danube or the Rhine, with its wide halls, its sounding corridors, its stately picture-galleries filled with the masterpieces of Albert Durer, of Holbein, and the like. We know further how, in the midst of men and women who seemed to move and breathe along its walls, that fearful shadow in the midst was even then mocking at their false pretences to life. We know how the bereaved mother and forlorn sisters knelt continually beneath, praying for the repose of the dead, and how the shuddering vassals crossed themselves as they passed. We know all this; but we read it by a light which lives and spreads within, as soon as it has been kindled for us from without. And therefore I go on to say that we feel ourselves to be in the presence of a great rhetorician, no doubt, but also in that of

a genuine poet. Nay, so completely does the innermost poetry of a line lie in the soul, and not in the outward form of words, that the very same passage may be high poetry or simple prose according to the suggestions which it involves. When Ariel, in answer to Prospero's inquiries as to how it is possible that the affections of a man injured as he had been should be touched by the misery of his foes, replies at once, 'mine would, sir, were they human,' nothing can be more unpretending than this brief speech considered as to its form of expression; but what interminable insights does it not open out into the world of spirits, and the infinite gradations of being!

Again, to use a more modern instance, Robert Browning's Duke of Ferrara, in that wonderful little tragedy of his, 'My Last Duchess,' dismisses the terror-stricken envoy from his future bride's father, in the following words:—

> 'Taming a sea-horse thought a rarity
> Which Claus of Innspruck cast in bronze for me.'

If we are to suppose this quiet observation to be addressed to some fair-haired English Milordo who, with the mediæval equivalent for Murray in his hand, had blundered up against a courteous Italian prince, it would be absolute, not to say rather bald prose; but

coming, as it does, at the end of that dreadful series of hints, through which the ambassador must convey to the new wife, if he takes any interest in his own life, without implicating the Duke of Ferrara, 'woe to him if he does this,'—a warning not to be mistaken; it is lighted up by a terrible significance from within. We shudder to feel that if the innocent bride-elect lifts a finger or raises an eyelash except in harmony with the unspoken bidding of her lord, the grave which holds the beautiful original of one veiled portrait has room for her also, and that the picture-galleries of Ferrara even yet are not without available space; and acknowledge heartily, with how slight a motion of his hand, the man of real genius can create an imperishable dramatic effect.

And this brings us to another question much discussed and open to much discussion—the comparative merits of the vigorous grasp, as opposed to the impalpable touchings of the poetical imagination. There can be no doubt that where the vigorous grasp of a subject is possible, such a grasp should always be laid upon it; but there are regions of poetry, perhaps the very highest, beyond the reach of the human eye, except through fluctuating glimpses and visionary hints. And a grander dream of suggestion may visit the heart of

an intelligent disciple, where the poet catches, or half catches, an evanescent ray from lights behind the sun, than if he had measured his distances and counted up his materials with the precision of an architectural draughtsman. When Alfred Tennyson in his 'In Memoriam' attempts to rest on the cheering belief that the soul of his friend, and of my friend, was removed for high purposes and events; and utters his passionate longing for faith, in these sublime words:—

'The wish, that of the living whole
No life may fail beyond the grave;
Derives it not from what we have
The likest God within the soul?

'Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

'That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear;

'I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God:'—

he would not, so far as I am concerned, have improved his picture by telling us that the stairs in question were of white marble, as if they had been

hewn out of the quarries of Carrara; and that each of the steps was twice as large as those which led up to St. Peter's Church at Rome.

We now come to a much contested point on which it would ill become me to pronounce a confident opinion, in the face of such thinkers as Coleridge, as Wordsworth, as Ruskin, not to speak of others; the distinction, I mean, deep and vital, which they profess to have discovered between the fancy and the imagination. It would ill become me, I say, to pronounce a confident opinion, but at the same time, as I am bound here to be perfectly frank and open, I must at once state, and, in venturing upon such a statement, I am happy to find myself fortified by the high authority of Mr. Dallas, that I cannot accept their conclusions. To begin with the etymology of the words, though I lay no more stress thereon than it deserves (it indicates at least the original belief of mankind), 'imagination' is simply Latin for 'fancy;' 'fancy' merely Greek for 'imagination.' In spite of this, however, I am by no means insensible to the convenience of classing those inward pictures which spring up in light minds, or at least in lighter moods of mind, apart from those which embody the nobler and stronger forms of passion and of thought.

To that extent, therefore, I willingly recognise the distinction which our English language, according to its later arrangement, establishes between them. To any further extent I do not recognise it. I believe that the picturesque procession of Queen Mab, which, in Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare formed for the delight of his hearers, and which is usually presented to us as an admirable instance of poetic fancy, was seen by Shakespeare according to precisely the same laws of inward vision, as were called into action when Dante beheld those dilating flakes of fire which fell slowly upon the enemies of God, as the snow falls heavily among the Alps, without a sound. And yet I suppose none would deny that the Italian lines to which I refer compose a fine imaginative picture. Shakespeare from his memory, his reading, his powers of observation and combination, blended together one set of images into a bright and sparkling whole. Dante, from his memory, his reading, his powers of observation and combination, blended together another set of images into a gloomy and impressive whole. But I say the *modus operandi* was in both cases exactly the same. Two separate faculties were no more needed to call into life these two separate poetical creations, than we, under the laws of the physical world, need two retinas,

one framed for glancing at a fire-fly, and the other for contemplating a fixed star.

To me, indeed, it seems that the upholders of the opposite theory would do well to examine themselves, so as to learn whether they have kept before their judgment with sufficient steadiness a truth which no one disputes in words, but which may often be, in the haste and tumult of thought, practically forgotten. Namely, that however expedient, however desirable we may consider it in discussions of this sort to talk of memory and imagination and humour and fancy, as if they were independent and self-existing substances, they are, after all, intimately and indissolubly united in one homogeneous mind. The composite life within is always one thing, and acts invariably in one mass. Like Wordsworth's cloud, 'it moveth altogether, if it move at all.' Hence the reason and humour of an imaginative man contain elements which the reason and humour of an unimaginative man do not contain; hence also the imagination of a humourist and logician is interpenetrated by logic and humour, and the mind acts as a whole under the combined influence of these three separate forces. Above all does one imagination differ from another, according to the proportions in

which a certain energy and glow of soul is mixed up with it.

And here, unless I deceive myself, is the true practical difference between what the English people choose *now* to call by the Greek name of fancy, and what they prefer to speak of under the Latin name of imagination. Imagination is fancy with ardour of thought, and heat of passion burning through it. Fancy is imagination, playing as the northern light, and glittering without intensity and without warmth. Nay, so absolutely, from my point of view, is this the case, that the very same work of art may appear to one critic fanciful, and to another imaginative, according as they respectively perceive, or overlook, in it the presence of passion. For instance, Mr. Ruskin, in one of those eloquent passages which make us proud of the English language, is giving due honour to his favourite painter Tintoretto. In the course of his panegyric, he presents to us, as the crowning glory of that illustrious artist, his almost superhuman imagination. A picture of Christ crucified is the one upon which, above all others, he delights to dwell. In this the fickleness of the Jews, and indeed the evanescent character of all mere human love, is symbolized by an ass's colt in the background, such a one,

we may presume, as the Saviour had ridden upon a few days before, feeding now upon withered palm-leaves, the same, no doubt, which had been strewed, in their freshness, across the triumphal path of the accepted Messiah. Now I feel sure that Mr. Ruskin is here perfectly right, but neither can I hesitate to believe, that the mighty Venetian of whom he speaks grew more and more inflamed by an overmastering impulse of sympathy as he brooded over his own work. The divine face of the suffering Mediator, visible only to him, must have pressed in upon his heart and filled it with a living glow of affection. Out of a reaction from this he must have flung upon his canvas, with all the magic power of genius, a fiery scorn and an inspiring hatred against those cowards who had deserted and those miscreants who had betrayed the Son of God. And thus arose, for all time, that which Mr. Ruskin has recorded as the sublimest achievement of imagination, yet accomplished by any painter-poet, among the sons of men. Otherwise, if we suppose the like point introduced by one of colder temperament into a picture on the same subject, as a stroke of art, it might well be considered as too clever, too ingenious, too much under the same conditions of thought as Hogarth's happy incident of the spider's

web woven across the poor-box, to be classed with the highest efforts of man's creative intelligence. In a word, I should say definitively that it was fanciful, and not imaginative.

I stated, at the opening of this Lecture, that one of the subjects which it might be expedient to discuss was, what are the effects which imagination indulged tends to produce upon the character at large? I have, however, trespassed upon your attention too long already, and must content myself by indicating my belief that the use of the imagination, as a moral element, is to fight against selfishness. This it ought to do, by giving life to an intelligent sympathy with the thoughts and emotions of others; whilst the danger to which it exposes men is, that if they give way to the habit of looking 'upon the world as a stage, and on all its men and women as merely players,' the heart may grow cold, even whilst the understanding is enlarged. It is obvious, however, that this is a matter which would require, if any justice is to be done to it, a lecture to itself. I shall therefore put it by for the present, and conclude by thanking you for the patience and attention with which you have listened to this somewhat ill-organized discourse.

PROVINCIAL POETRY.

LECTURE II.

PROVINCIAL POETRY.

When Monsieur De Talleyrand, if Monsieur De Talleyrand it were who is the author of the well-known saying, amused an ultra-civilized company of wits and diplomatists by telling them that speech was first given to man in order that he might conceal his thoughts, it is probable that he had in his mind Parisian French, Queen's English, very choice Italian, Attic Greek, Ciceronian Latin, and the like: that kind of diction, in a word, to which are liable, more or less, most of those books that no gentleman's library ought to be without. One main reason, in the opposite direction, which leads me to speak here of provincial poetry and provincial poets, is my belief that this celebrated sarcasm does not apply to those rustic dialects which have never diluted themselves, like the expanding circles of a pond, over the wide surface of literary com-

monplace. The words in use among uneducated men are (I imagine) but few; they accommodate themselves to the every-day topics and elementary passions which make up the daily life of the village or the farm. The same subjects of conversation, if conversation it can be called, recur at the same times, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year. And the talk of the alehouse, or the blacksmith's shop, seldom passes out far beyond them. Hence when a labourer, still more when a labourer's wife, happens to possess an energetic understanding, a lively imagination, or a vehement temper, she has to struggle up to eloquence by making all the language within reach bend under her till it cracks. Every phrase is, as it were, double-shotted with meaning. Vivid metaphors are pressed into their place, not to decorate a sentence, not to round a period, but, with the true object of all such illustrations, to quicken and fortify the sense. She pounces upon them, and drags them towards her from every quarter, so that she may bridge over the shortest road home to the hearts and intellects of her audience. Such a woman I met not so very long ago in one of our northern districts. She was boiling up with eager wrath against an oppressive squire, who, according to her, had treated a deserving tenant with shameless

injustice. It was clear that pour out her emotions upon somebody she must; and perhaps it occurred to her that I, as a stranger and a bird of passage, was a safer confidant than any of her particular friends. I know nothing of the facts of the case, and therefore neither acquit nor condemn the supposed delinquent. Her story, at any rate, ran thus:—The tenant in question was one who, like Tennyson's *Northern Farmer*, had a passionate sense of his duty to the land. If she represented him truly, he worked early and late, paying his rent to a moment, and improving his fields with a zeal that never slackened, not so much in the hope of conciliating his landlord, or of increasing his worldly substance, as to feel his life keen within him, and to satisfy the natural instincts of his soul. But though admirable in these respects, he was not altogether the discreetest of men, or, as she put it, 'He wor an oonhandy kind of chap, who let his toongue wagg in pooblic-hoose.' Now this ill-advised wagging of the tongue, in that dangerous part of the hamlet, unhappily set in motion certain scandals, of which it is unnecessary to say more, than that the lord of the manor objected to their public discussion among his humbler neighbours. Some pickthank contrived to let the little great man know what had taken place, and

he, so she informed me, was ungenerous enough to wreak a mean revenge. All this she flung forth in her fiery Yorkshire, which crackled and rung as she gave it out, (Yorkshire, compared with which my pottering dictionary-English is as the outer to the inner rainbow,) and ended her impassioned declamation (of the truth or justice of which, I repeat, I know nothing) in the following words:—'He broake him in no time at a'. He blaacked him reet awa'.' Now you or I should probably have said, he never rested till he had accomplished his ruin, or some such platitude. This woman, however, had but little of such Norman-English at command. From her very poverty she was compelled to make herself rich. From her very incapacity to find ordinary words, strong enough to hold her meaning, she was forced into a noble image; at least by the power of that phrase, 'He blaacked him reet awa',' she has left, sculptured on my imagination ever since, the form of her sorrowing friend, walled round, without a gleam of sunshine, by the darkness of despair, buried alive, so to speak, under the gloom of his unmerited misfortunes.

On another occasion, a stalwart ploughman, believing in himself, and honourably conscious that he never gave less than a day's work for a day's wages,

refused to acknowledge any obligation to a master, for whom, neither in point of ability nor in point of character, did he feel any respect, and compressed his burst of resolute independence into the following weighty sentence:—'I'se neither debt-bound, nor awe-bound till him.' Again, a quaint old gardener, whom I knew well, took the measure of his master, a clever but indolent man, in these words:—'Sir Thomas is nae fule, but he's t' ignorantest mànn as is; he knows nought about ought.' The same worthy, complaining to a married woman, one of the daughters of the house, that his walls got no rest from busy little fingers (he never, even in a dream, considered the fruit as belonging to anybody but himself), she endeavoured to console him, by pointing out that in both generations, her's and the next, the family had overflowed with girls. 'We might,' she said, 'have been all boys, and where would you have been then?' But he, deeply meditating on these things, shook his head, and replied,—'Na, lass; na, then, I should have got shut on you whiles.' In plain English, I should have got rid of you, except when you were at home for the holidays. He felt, much as a Sicilian or North African of old might have preferred a flying inroad of pirates or Moors to the steady exactions of his Roman Pro-

consul, that, with the public school for an ally, he could endure a transitory storm of boys, if only he were spared the constant tribute levied upon him by permanent young ladies. Now, such massive bits of vernacular speech, wherever we light upon them, teach us that a non-literary tongue may, within certain limits (narrow enough no doubt when compared with the larger aims of language), possess advantages peculiar to itself. The principal of these seems to be that a vigorous mind has to impress a portion of its own strength and life upon the few forms of utterance which constitute its whole vocabulary; otherwise there would not really be enough of them to get on with at all. On the other hand, men brought up mainly upon words, men who have all the conventional expressions and accredited phrases from the elegant extracts ready at call, are apt to be overwhelmed by their allies; they are apt, sometimes even when there is real power, to be embarrassed and weighed down by great lumps of commonplace diction, much of which, like the copper money that hampered poor Correggio to death, has but little, except bulk and abundance, to recommend it to mankind. Dr. Johnson, for instance, if he had been born in Yorkshire or Dorsetshire, and had published his imitations of Juvenal

in either of these dialects, would never, I am sure, have started off in the tenth satire with so vague and futile a personification as—

> 'Let observation, with extensive view,
> Survey mankind from China to Peru.'

The high road of the national language we will consider, if you please, as built to sustain the pressure of the whole English mind—to find room for the passage up and down of all great thoughts, all wide-reaching imaginations, all stormy passions, which enter into our national life. But still there may be certain shy graces of idiom and feeling which, like wild roses, or thorn-blossoms, or lilies of the valley, are more likely to be found among the nooks and windings of a Devonshire or Dorsetshire lane. When, therefore, poems full of beauty and power, like Mr. Tennyson's 'Northern Farmer,' or the lyrics of Mr. Barnes, are given to the world, it would be a mistake to consider them as originating in mere whim and caprice on the part of their authors. We have heard that when my friend Lord Houghton read the 'Northern Farmer' to his tenants, and ex-constituents, round about Ferrybridge and Pontefract, they rose at him as one man, shouting together, 'That caps a',' and begged to be informed—a recognition of merit which speaks volumes for the right-

hearted population north of Trent—where the book, which contained so fine a poem, might be summarily bought? I do not wish to step out of my province, but I cannot help remarking, that our statesmen, having first opened wide the doors which were formerly locked, and removed the shutter-bars originally intended to protect the house, are now making haste to tell us that they know little of the crowds sure to swarm in; but that it is everybody's instant business to educate them, so that they may not push. If this be so, the story which I have just told indicates that there are veins of feeling still unworked, modes of access to the deeper thoughts and emotions of our fellow-countrymen yet almost unexplored; and these, as a step in the right direction, it may be as well to occupy at once. If, therefore, in order to commence the poetical part of the people's parliamentary education, we need no more than that a channel should be cleared out for those well-springs of speech, any one of which might have been the main feeder of our English tongue—if men, whose daily thoughts and words are too remote from those of our established poets to be in any degree impressed by them, are yet to be reached and taught, so far as poetry can be made a teacher, by the help of their native dialects,—the fact, I apprehend, is an

important one. Under such circumstances we cannot, I am sure, be ready enough to hail Mr. Barnes, Mr. Waugh, and other labourers in the same field, with due reward, ample honour, and immediate recognition. Nay, even if we put aside such practical aims, as foreign to the scope of a professorship like this; from a philological point of view such labours are full of interest and value. By turning up the subsoil about the roots of our language, we may strengthen the trunk, and possibly enrich some of the branches with unexpected fruit. If, to descend to minutiæ—if, by the help of provincial poets, we could recover for ordinary use such adjectives as 'silvern,' etc.—recover them, I mean, without worrying our readers by any sense of pedantry or strangeness (nothing is worth that), we should get rid of a defect in idiom to which we have been hurried, through our metropolitan impatience of delay. When substantives, such as 'silver' and the like, are thus put upon double duty, I think it is a mark of poverty, or stinginess, in the establishment to which they belong; reminding us somewhat of Molière's 'Avare,' in which, as we know, Harpagon's cook was his coachman also; but I do not think we should, on that account, have been tempted to accompany the miser in a drive, and I am sure that we should have refused, one and all, his

invitations to dinner. It is an odd instance, by the way, of the unequal manner in which time and custom act upon language, that whereas 'silvern' has drifted entirely, or all but entirely, out of reach,—so that Mr. Tennyson rightly personifies the evening star as 'Sitting under *silver* hair with a silver eye,'—the corresponding epithet 'golden' still keeps its head above water, though somewhat hardly pressed. We talk of a gold watch, gold plate, and so on, but we write about golden hair, golden hours, golden children, and the like; though what 'golden children' may mean is not so easy to say—'possibly the German equivalent for what we call yellow-boys,' as I once heard suggested to a student of Schiller's lyrics, who stuck at the phrase. Instances of this kind are numerous enough: one word perishes, another, apparently with no particular reason for outlasting it, lives on. Now a good deal of light may be thrown upon the language if we search, among the provincial varieties of speech, for these vanished or vanishing forms and idioms. Though any one of them would, I am sure, repay investigation, the Dorsetshire variety in which most of Mr. Barnes's poems are written, is the one which it is most natural for me to examine at present. Its participles want the hard final *g* of ours: for instance—

'The light of waves a *runnén* there
Did play on leaves up over head,
And fishes scaly sides did gleam,
A *dartén* on their shallow bed.'

Now, upon the whole, I do not prefer this grammatical form to our own; the English last syllable lends itself better to a keen and ringing melody, and carries within itself a greater appearance of strength. But sometimes, where graceful sentiment is aimed at, where pathos, in its lighter aspects, is what we require—as in some rustic idyll or tender song—if we could only give the Dorsetshire participle a brevet and local rank, to act as Queen's English for the nonce, we should, I think, be richer in point of diction than we are. Still more do I envy Mr. Barnes his old plurals in *-en*, such as housen, cheesen, furzen. Everybody knows what an intrusive, ubiquitous creature is the unmanageable English *s*. Every one who writes verses has been bothered about *s* pure and *s* impure. And though we Britons have to put a bold face upon the matter, and to maintain that the cacophony in question does not signify at all; it is only because we cannot help ourselves, and have given up all hope of a remedy. Now if once more—in accordance with Horace's dictum that 'multa renascentur, quae jam cecidere'—we could call back from oblivion and disuse that

valuable termination in *-en*, it is impossible to say what metrical triumphs might not be achieved. We might even hope to allay, if we could not wholly quench, the disembodied hiss which floats round a church, whenever the school children pause in their hymn. I fear greatly, however, that this cannot now be done; I fear that a language, so long as it lives, must roll on like a river, which becomes broader, and deeper, and of greater importance, at each stride of its onward course; separating hostile kingdoms perhaps, or bearing huge three-deckers down to the sea; but which yet, alas! also leaves behind, at every bend, more and more, the flower-crowned banks and sparkling purity of its parent brook. Nay, to the annoyance of literary men, I believe that whenever Horace's anticipations are realised, whenever his proposed renaissance does take place, it takes place as a necessity, and not as a luxury of language. I doubt whether Mr. Tennyson, with all his genius, and all his popularity, could re-awaken one strong preterite which has really lapsed; whilst railway navvies, with a sublime unconsciousness, like that of the brewer's horse, who undertook (through a godfather, I admit) to draw a thousand inferences at once, have disinterred, and brought into daily use, the sound old English verb

'*to shunt*'—a verb which had slept, somewhere or other, like the annual toad of our coal-mines, since it was last alive and awake for poets who flourished before Chaucer.

If, however, determination can do anything—if the laws of human speech are in any degree to be influenced by the human will—here is a proper occasion for its exercise. Men more sanguine than I am might think that the power of varying our hissing plurals, by a recurrence to the old plurals in *-en* which yet linger in the provinces, is not absolutely lost and gone. If so, let us hope sooner or later to see sportsmen shooting their fifty brace of grousen on the 12th of August, Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli fighting out their differences in full housen, and young ladies engaged for twenty successive dancen, even from the time of this present Commemoration. But no, alas! *volat irrevocabile verbum*,—all I can say is, if it were possible to accomplish successfully this literary feat, he who accomplished it would deserve £4000,—ay, from the most economical of governments — much better than the gentleman who patented that method of punching holes between postage-stamps, which to me, I speak humbly as a blind and awkward man, appears a success—only for the inventor.

I have dwelt at some length on the possible philological value of such poetical studies, because I find that among young people who are at first disposed to admire the exquisite lyrics of Mr. Barnes, this admiration is followed at once by a hot fit of wrath, and a sense of being cheated, as soon as they discover that he is a scholar and a gentleman. A popular writer—De Quincey, I think—tells a story of his ill success in lending 'The Vicar of Wakefield' to his landlady's daughter, somewhere among the Westmoreland lakes. At first, the girl took intense interest in the tale, accepted the *dramatis personae* as real men and women, and loved and hated them with all the proper emphasis of youth; but, alas! suddenly it was revealed to her that the book was a work of fiction. Now that was a portent, the idea of which had never crossed her innocent mind. Accordingly she became furious at the supposed deception, looked upon De Quincey as bankers look upon a man who has tried knowingly to utter a forged bill of exchange; and, as for Goldsmith, if she could have resuscitated him, and had her will, she would have consigned him to Appleby jail as a rogue and a vagabond, for obtaining sympathy under false pretences Just so fared the unfortunate Mr. Barnes, at the hands of those to whom I refer. Oh!

said they, he is a gentleman after all, is he? Oh! we thought he was a ploughman. Oh! we don't care a bit about his poetry now. I endeavoured to convince them they were entirely in the wrong; but of that strategical operation I have always observed that, however skilfully and zealously it may be undertaken, it is apt, with regard to young and old alike, to fail of success in the most unaccountable manner. With you, however, who are not committed to any opinions on the subject, I hope to do better. Now, when a man of great natural genius, like Burns (God forbid that I should call Burns a provincial poet; but I may perhaps be allowed to use him for purposes of illustration), thinks and feels, and writes what he thinks and feels, in one dialect, after having been imperfectly educated in another, he is apt to attach a fictitious value to the long words and polyglot phrases which he may have gathered from his dialect of education. Let us take an instance: when Burns, in one of his most characteristic outbursts, carries us off our critical feet by this lyrical impulse—

> 'Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears
> Her noblest work she classes, oh!
> Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
> And *then* she made the lasses, oh!'

the spirit, grace, and sparkling originality of the two

last lines charm us away from examining the two first; but, if we refuse to listen to the voice of the charmer, it cannot be denied that the conception of nature, classing her lovely dears, is an intrusion, what geologists call a 'fault,' of school English, cutting awkwardly across the vein of his inborn Scottish idiom. But when a scholar like Mr. Barnes, who, besides being thoroughly acquainted with the way of thinking, and the way of talking, which prevails in his native district, adds research to that familar knowledge, traces the expressions which he finds about him home to their proper origin, and looks at them by the light of comparative philology, this criticism does not apply. Such a man, when he writes, can trust himself safely to the impulses of his own mind, and will probably give us better Dorsetshire, better Yorkshire, better Scotch, as the case may be, than the clever peasant or artisan who has learnt but little outside his native tongue, and therefore overvalues that little. Such a peasant is in danger of fancying that he rises above himself, whenever he inserts, among his own idioms, a word of four syllables derived from the Latin—whenever, to recall an old Joe Miller, he edifies his village hearers by using that 'blessed word Mesopotamia.'

Having thus endeavoured to persuade you that you

are not bound to despise Mr. Barnes, because, instead of being an ignorant man of genius, he is a learned man of genius, I shall now proceed to call your attention to the poems which he has written. I do not mean to confine myself to him altogether; but he merits our particular attention. Mr. Barnes, with an accurate estimate, I think, not so much of his own powers, as of the powers and resources of his Dorsetshire Doric, has confined himself to the lyrical interpretation of such simple emotions as arise out of the simple drama of an average country life. I refer this absence of ambitious aim, in his little odes, to the nature of his dialect, rather than to any deficiency in himself; because I do not choose to believe, though some such assumption is constantly made, that the art of doing one thing very well implies that you are to do everything else particularly ill. We all remember Horace's encomium, which strikes us now as such an inadequate one—

> 'Molle atque facetum
> *Virgilio* annuerunt gaudentes rure Camoenae.'

It is clear that he looked to Varius as the heroic bard of the time, and never suspected for a moment that in his ingenious asthmatic friend, who wrote

such graceful verses about ploughs, and olives, and bees, and Corycian old men, lay hid the author of the national epic. But whatever Mr. Barnes' reasons may be—want of power, want of will, or a scientific measurement of the capabilities and non-capabilities of his own provincial tongue — as a fact he has attempted nothing inconsistent with the character which he has assumed—that, namely, of a small Dorsetshire farmer. He dwells lovingly upon the lights and shadows which play among the wooded coverts of his native hills, upon the bells of his village church, upon the dear old mill:—

'Oh, joy betide the dear old mill,
My neighbour play-mate's happy home,
With rolling wheel and leaping foam
Below the overhanging hill.
Where wide and slow
The stream did flow,
And flags did grow, and lightly flee,
Below the grey-leaved withy tree;
Whilst clack, clack, clack, from hour to hour
Did go the mill by cloty Stour.'

I must here pause to explain the word 'cloty'—the rather that it illustrates something which I said, at the outset of this lecture, as to the compensations which belong to a non-literary language; I mean, that when a peasant speaks of anything within the circle of his

daily occupations, he gives it, as a distinguished friend of mine acutely observed to me, a special name to itself. A sheep, for instance, of a certain age—I am sure I do not know of what age—which we should describe at length, he pithily calls a tegg. A yellow water-lily, to put which clumsily before our readers we require three words, he marks off at once as a 'clote,' whilst the river upon whose breast it lies floating, becomes, for him, the '*cloty* Stour.' And thus he condenses into two syllabes a rural picture which it would take, I believe, two lines to paint in English proper. To return, however, as the French proverb has it, to our teggs, Mr. Barnes does his work among the ordinary scenery, the ordinary joys and sorrows of a commonplace English county. And here his position, as we must admit, contrasts unfavourably with that of Burns. Burns had a proud national history to appeal to; there were, in every direction, national sensibilities, founded on a haughty sense of blood and of race, ready to answer such an appeal; whereas anything emphatically English is somewhat out of Mr. Barnes' reach, because what he has undertaken to deliver is, not the universal English, but the local Dorsetshire mind. However, even in a commonplace English county, love and death are as busy as

over the regions beyond, and the true poet, having them to deal with, requires but little else. Moreover, paradoxical as it may seem to say so of one who uses such a dialect, Mr. Barnes has done much to atone for a certain inevitable monotony in the choice of his subjects—a limitation of ideas and images, forced upon him through the narrowness of the path which he has chosen to tread—by cultivating, in the execution of his short poems, a most exquisite finish of style. He has felt, I think very justly, that anything like slovenliness of diction, metrical harshness, nimiety (if I may use a word which I am sure I have seen somewhere) would be more intolerable in him, than in writers who make use of average English like the rest of us. Accordingly, as a rule, his little pieces exhibit a delicate grace and a completeness not unworthy of Horace. It is time, however, to allow our poet to speak for himself. Some of the poems are short comic dialogues, intended to set forth, in that form, the characteristic features, as they appear to him, of his Dorsetshire neighbourhood. But whatever merit they may possess from that point of view, they do not strike me as being among his happier efforts, and in no degree approach to the grim pathos and dramatic humour of the 'Northern Farmer.' It is

through his own pathos however, but pathos generally of the lighter and more sentimental kind, that he takes his proper rank—a high rank, I think, among contemporary writers of verse; and indeed, though I say this as generally true, it would be unfair to deny that he sometimes rises into a higher mood, and gives way to deeper impulses of feeling and of thought. I propose now to read to you one or more of his shorter poems, premising only that I shall read them so as to be understood. The Dorsetshire dialect, I am happy to say, admits of this without difficulty; in a more northern one, it could perhaps hardly have been managed. Indeed, except where the local word is used as a rhyme, nothing is lost by transferring Mr. Barnes' lines into our common tongue—they pass, without an effort, into good and simple English. In the following little ode, for instance, which he calls 'The Echo,' if you will only bear in mind that 'slooe' is the Dorsetshire form of our 'sloe,' and 'sheen' of the verb 'to shine,' you have ready for your ears some beautiful English verses.

THE ECHO.

'About the tow'r an' churchyard wall,
Out nearly overright our door,
A tongue ov wind did always call
Whatever we did call avore.

The vaïce did mock our neämes, our cheers,
Our merry laughs, our hands' loud claps,
An' mother's call "Come, come, my dears"
—*my dears;*
Or "Do as I do bid, bad chaps"
—*bad chaps.*

'An' when o' Zundays on the green,
In frocks an' cwoats as gaÿ as new,
We walk'd wi' shoes a-meäde to sheen
So black an' bright 's a vull-ripe slooe,
We then did hear the tongue ov aïr
A-mockèn mother's vaïce so thin,
"Come, now the bell do gоо vor praÿ'r"
—*vor pray'r;*
"'Tis time to goo to church; come in"
—*come in.*

'The night when little Anne that died
Begun to zickèn, back in Maÿ,
An' she, at dusk ov evenèn-tide,
Wer out wi' others at their plaÿ,
Within the churchyard that do keep
Her little bed, the vaïce o' thin
Dark aïr, mock'd mother's call "To sleep"
—*to sleep;*
"'Tis bed time now, my love, come in"
—*come in.*

'An' when our Jeäne come out so smart
A-married, an' we help'd her in
To Henry's newly-varnish'd cart,
The while the wheels begun to spin,

An' her gaÿ nods, vor all she smil'd,
Did sheäke a tear-drop vrom each eye,
The vaïce mock'd mother's call, "Dear child"
—*dear child;*
"God bless ye evermwore; good bye"
—*good bye.*'

The four last lines of the third stanza are, in my judgment, exquisite above the rest:—

'Within the churchyard that do keep
Her little bed, the vaïce o' thin
Dark aïr, mock'd mother's call "To sleep,"
—*to sleep;*
"'Tis bed time now, my love, come in,"
—*come in.*'

The manner in which this ominous echo, 'come in,' breathing forth, upon the doomed child, its phantom-like summons from her future home within the grave, yet softens itself into the likeness of a mother's voice calling her child to sleep, can hardly be too much admired. It imparts a spiritual grace to the whole poem, and teaches us, better than many sermons, how that place within the churchyard is, after all, but a place of quiet, 'where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' In spite, however, of the charm and impressiveness of this affecting stanza, Mr. Barnes feels that to finish thus would react, with too much solemnity, on the primal conception of this little piece, and

so jar upon his fine artistic perceptions; he therefore skilfully rounds off these suggestions of his memory by introducing, after the burial, a bridal, wherewith to end; but still, in order to chime in with the key-note from which he started, it is not the glow of triumphant love, nor the joyous revel of the wedding-bells, to which he invites our attention, but the gentle regrets and natural tears of the maiden, as she departs, into a new home, from her mother's clinging embrace. He leaves us, therefore, cheered with a gleam of brightness and a touch of pleasure, but the brightness, in order that it may not be out of harmony with his original theme, is a subdued one, and the pleasure not without melancholy.

The next poem which I shall read to you is 'The Rose in the Dark,' p. 32; in this case, it is unnecessary to make any preface at all.

THE RWOSE IN THE DARK.

'In zummer, leäte at evenèn tide,
I zot to spend a moonless hour
'Ithin the window, wi' the zide
A-bound wi' rwoses out in flow'r,
Bezide the bow'r, vorsook o' birds,
An' listen'd to my true-love's words.

'A-risèn to her comely height,
She push'd the swingèn ceäsement round;
And I could hear, beyond my zight,
The win'-blown beech-tree softly sound,
On higher ground, a-swayèn slow,
On drough my happy hour below.

'An' tho' the darkness then did hide
The dewy rwose's blushèn bloom,
He still did cast sweet aïr inside
To Jeäne, a-chattèn in the room;
An' though the gloom did hide her feäce,
Her words did bind me to the pleäce.

'An' there, while she, wi' runnèn tongue,
'Did talk unzeen 'ithin the hall,
I thought her like the rwose that flung
His sweetness vrom his darken'd ball,
'Ithout the wall, an' sweet 's the zight
Ov her bright feäce, by mornèn light.'

Every one, I think, will agree with me in looking upon this as a country love-idyll exquisite of its kind. It is also a good instance of Mr. Barnes' fine taste in knowing when and where to stop, in discerning how much poetical embroidery a little incident of this kind will bear, so that he may not overwork his subject, or overload it with ornament. 'The Snowy Night' is a companion picture to the 'Rose in the Dark,' only somewhat keener and livelier in point of colouring: it carries with it a Christmas sparkle of

December stars, instead of the fragrant gloom of a breathless evening in June. No preliminary instruction is needed, except that you ought to be told the meaning of the Dorsetshire word 'lew'—it means 'screened,' 'sheltered.'

A SNOWY NIGHT.

'Twer at night, an' a keen-win' did blow
Vrom the east under peäle-twinklèn stars,
All a-zweepèn along the white snow;
On the groun', on the trees, on the bars,
Vrom the hedge where the win' rüssled droo,
There a light-russlèn snow-doust did vall;
An' noo pleäce were a-vound that wer lew,
But the shed, or the ivy-hung wall.

'Then I knock'd at the wold passage door
Wi' the win'-driven snow on my locks;
Till, a-comèn along the cwold vloor,
There my Jenny soon answer'd my knocks.
Then the wind, by the door a-swung wide,
Flung some snow in her clear-bloomèn feäce,
An' she blink'd, wi' her head all a-zide,
An' a-chucklèn, went back to her pleäce.

'An' in there, as we zot roun' the brands,
Though the talkers wer maïnly the men,
Bloomèn Jeäne, wi' her work in her hands,
Did put in a good word now an' then.
An' when I took my leave, though so bleäk
Wer the weather, she went to the door,
Wi' a smile, an' a blush on the cheäk
That the snow had a-smitten avore.'

The last poem with which I shall trouble you is 'The Turnstile.' In this you have only to be tolerant of 'goo' for 'go' and 'overjayed' for 'overjoyed.'

THE TURNSTILE.

'Ah! sad wer we as we did peäce
The wold church road, wi' downcast feäce,
The while the bells, that mwoan'd so deep
Above our child a-left asleep,
Wer now a-zingèn all alive
W' t'other bells to meäke the vive.
But up at woone pleäce we come by,
'Twere hard to keep woone's two eyes dry;
On Steän-cliff road, 'ithin the drong,
Up where, as vo'k do pass along,
The turnèn-stile, a-païnted white,
Doo sheen by day an' show by night.
Vor always there, as we did goo
To church, thik stile did let us drough,
Wi' spreadèn eärms that wheel'd to guide
Us each in turn to t'other zide.
An' vu'st ov all the traïn he took
My wife, wi' winsome gaït an' look;
An' then zent on my little maïd,
As skippèn onward, overjay'd
To reach ageän the pleäce o' pride,
Her comely mother's left han' zide.
An' then, a-wheelèn roun', he took
On me, 'ithin his third white nook.
An' in the fourth, a-sheäkèn wild,
He zent us on our giddy child.
But yesterday he guided slow
My downcast Jenny, vull o' woe,

An' then my little maïd in black,
A-walkèn softly on her track;
An' a'ter he'd a-turn'd ageän,
To let me goo along the leäne,
He had noo little bwoy to vill
His last white eärms, an' they stood still.'

Now this little poem, as a representation of quiet sadness—sadness not yielding to despair, but nevertheless clouding the common daylight, and tinging each familiar object with the shadow of its own blackness, is, so far as I can judge, unsurpassed in its way. At the same time, I own that I have some difficulty in assigning to such a poem its proper place on the scale of poetic excellence. A pathetic wail, like the one I have just read, like Mrs. Hemans' 'Graves of a Household,' like many others which you will easily recall, is sure of producing its full effect —sure, I may say, of becoming an universal favourite. A critic, no doubt, may find it hard to determine how much of its influence is derived from instincts which are alive in all hearts at all times, from sympathies which tremble at a touch; and how much from the real genius shown by its author; but, whatever he may decide, we may feel sure that he will not be listened to, especially by the young, who have rather a turn for playing with sorrow, as children play with

fire until they have been burnt by it. Accepting, accordingly, their verdict for the present, I think we may fairly claim for 'The Turnstile' a high place in the very first rank of such charming compositions. I might multiply my quotations from Mr. Barnes indefinitely. Out of his three volumes, in the Dorsetshire dialect, many selections might be made of equal merit with the above; still, I think those which I have cited are characteristic specimens of the poet; so that a just notion may be drawn from them, both of what he usually aims at, and how he has succeeded in his attempts. At the time, moreover, when I began to turn this lecture over in my mind, several laudatory articles referring to him, which have recently appeared, were still unwritten. I do not, however, regret the labour which I have given to the subject; he deserves, unless I deceive myself, all and more than all, the notice which he has obtained; and I am happy to find the conclusions, at which I had arrived in this matter, fortified by the unanimous concurrence of so many able critics. It is surely no light praise for an author, by one and the same work, to render valuable services to philology, and to secure, without requiring a particle of indulgence on any ground of dialect, the renown of a distinguished poet.

There are other provincial poets, besides Mr. Barnes, of whom it might be proper to say something, notably Mr. Waugh, whose beautiful lyric 'Come Home to the Children and Me,' has made its way into the hearts of his keen-minded Lancashire fellow-countrymen. It is not, however, so easy to read off into English as the Dorsetshire idylls of Mr. Barnes, and therefore I shall not attempt it; the rather that I wish to call your attention to a much older ballad, which connects itself with some interesting speculations as to the manner in which epic poetry is born, and grows. I mean the well-known legend of Chevy Chase. Not only is this a provincial poem, but it is written, says Bishop Percy, in the broadest and coarsest northern dialect; at a time, too, when that northern half of England, if compared with the southern and western counties, was insignificant in point of wealth and population. And yet men found these rugged verses so full of fire and authentic force—so gallantly do they appeal to the strong English pulses that beat in Northumberland and in Cornwall alike, so rich are they in all those qualities which make war noble—that in a hundred years or so after its first publication, this rough Border lay was stirring the heart of Sir Philip Sidney like a trumpet, and taking its place, no longer

provincial, among the recognised trophies of our English literature.. I say of our English literature, because, though I am aware that there exists a Scottish version of the tale, for me a single stanza decides the proprietorship at once:—

> 'Our Scottish archers bent their bows,
> Their hearts were good and true,
> At the first flight of arrows sent
> They four-score English slew.'

Now this is a manifest, I may add a most unskilful adaptation and distortion of the lines. The spear or the axe, not the bow, was notoriously the Scottish weapon. We all must remember the gasp of patriotic despair through which Sir Walter Scott describes the pitiable equipment of his Hebridean archers, before the fight of Flodden:—

> 'but oh!
> Short was the shaft and weak the bow
> To that which England bore.'

Again, when Marmion, the grave and cautious ambassador from England, is taunted by James IV, and endeavours, in his answer, to check those unbridled passions of the king which are hurrying him to instant war, how does he proceed? Why, his warning begins, his warning ends, with an ominous allusion to the invincible arrows of England:—

'Much honoured were my humble home,
If thither brave King James should come;
But Nottingham has archers good,
And Yorkshire men are stern of mood,
Northumbrian prickers wild and rude;
And many a banner shall be torn,
And many a knight to earth be borne,
And many a sheaf of arrows spent,
Ere Scotland's king shall cross the Trent.'

Whether, however, this stern old song be in its original form Scotch or English, matters little. Both nations have a right to be proud of it. Earl Douglas frankly offers to peril his life, so that the blood of meaner men may not be spilt in his private quarrel. Earl Percy leans upon his hand—

'And sees the Douglas de;
Then takes the dead man by the hand,
And says, woe is me for thee.
To have saved thy life, I'd have parted with
My landés for years three;
For a better man, nor of heart, nor of hand,
Was not in all the north-countree.'

And so these two champions stand always together on the same level in our affections. They represent equally the highest form of middle-age chivalry, the highest type, I hope I may add, of our English character. Nor has that type, I trust, died out as yet upon our English soil.

I have heard, on the authority of an eye-witness, how in one of the fiercest and most dubious of our Peninsular struggles, a young French officer, superb of stature and brilliant in horsemanship, after rallying and remodelling his scattered brigade, came down, with the aspect of Henry of Navarre, waving a white handkerchief two lengths in front of that plunging cloud of cavalry which threatened to sweep the motionless battalions before it—into headlong ruin. But no, the English squares were too firmly rooted, the English volleys too true. Among the first who dropped, under their withering impact, was the gallant Frenchman. His baffled followers at once melted away into defeat. Still, even then, our advancing soldiers, with the light of victory on their brows, and the white heat of battle burning in their veins, bent for a moment in sadness over the stately form of their fallen foe, and muttered gloomily to each other, 'Poor gentleman, what a pity!' I could not but feel, when this anecdote was first told to me, that these men also, though the technical period of chivalry may be gone for ever—that these men also were born English knights, spiritual heirs, as we well may call them, to the generous Percy, and his high-hearted Northumbrian bard. It was not, however, so much to remind you of the merits of this

familiar poem, merits which the criticism of Addison in the 'Spectator' has ratified for all generations of Englishmen, as to make some remarks upon its epic character, that I have referred to it here. In the first place, we shall find that it sprung as it were from the soil, among the ancestral woodlands of those knights whose heroism it proclaims, whilst it deplores their untimely fate. In the next place, we may remark that the author, though he deals with real men and real manners, is careless altogether about the actual truth of his facts; he kills people who were not killed, confuses one skirmish with another, and treats accurate chronology with placid contempt. And yet how wrong we should be, (having historical access to other sources of information, we are sure of that,) if we denied that there was a substantial basis of well-grounded belief below this old Border song. The persons introduced into it, the events described, the known national results with which it manages to connect itself, all inform us that there lurks a vanished history beneath, as certainly as the rose-tinted clouds, that hang over the sunken sun, testify to the previous existence of daylight.

And here, if I may be permitted to digress for a moment, I would add that the same conclusion is to be arrived at, through mistier labyrinths of doubt, and

with a fainter confidence of having really landed ourselves at the goal, if we compare the Arthurian Tales with the monkish chronicle of Nennius. In that writer's bitter invective against Mael-Gwyn, who has on reasonable suggestions been identified with the legendary knight Lancelot, we discern a faint outline of the glorious personal qualities, as well as of the characteristic faults, which blend themselves into the impressive portrait, as drawn for us by his poets, of that mediæval Achilles. It seems as if eminent men left an ineffaceable mark upon their times, as if, however completely the truth of history may be overshadowed and blotted out by bewildering myths and traditions—however absolutely the truth of circumstances may perish, the truth of character nevertheless will survive.

To go back, however, to Chevy Chase. In the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, the patriotism of England became intensified in all directions, particularly in the Scotch direction; the men of Devon and of Somerset would be as keen against the 'daughter of debate,' or the poisoner Kerr, as any native of Bamboroughshire or Otterburn; so that the glowing stanzas of Chevy Chase would make a welcome for themselves, in any part of England, as soon as they were understood. In order,

however to get this opening for them, the language had to be somewhat changed, and immediately the required adapter arose. We have, as it happens, the two diminutive Iliads ready at hand, and whenever we please can compare them together. We see how the younger poet has dealt with the older, and accordingly may conjecture, if we choose, how such a process is apt to take place at other times. It must be confessed that, in this instance at any rate, the poem is not improved by it. I once travelled by rail in the same carriage with an enthusiastic and impassioned French cook; for three mortal hours did he hurl at my head a divine and conspicuous Philippic against the besotted Philistinism of the British kitchen-maid. Would that there had been, in my seat, to listen sympathetically, instead of me—my eminent predecessor. Among other profound truths, this artist explained with overwhelming eloquence, and at great length, how the outer leaves of lettuces, celery, and the like imbibe from the sun and the life-giving air a higher flavour and a finer energy than those which are shrouded within; but though, Cassandra-like, he everlastingly warned and adjured, the infatuated young woman in question would, under some foolish pretext of cleanliness or tidiness or immemorial custom, keep on trimming

and maiming their vegetables in spite of him. Somewhat after their fashion, the re-caster of Chevy Chase into English, whilst removing the rough border outside and husk, has pared away a little of its native freshness and pith—a little of that spirit and wild fragrance which it had drunk in from the self-sown forests and heather-clad fells of the North. But after all there is not much to complain of, all the best verses, all the happiest images, all the most striking thoughts, are substantially reproduced. There is but one observation, I think, sufficiently important in itself to call for a critical observation—the modern re-adjuster gives way to a momentary impulse of national spite, from which the old warrior-minstrel was wholly free. The spurious lines, I admit, have great force:—

'And the Lord Maxwell in likewise,
Did with the Douglas die,
Of twenty hundred Scottish spears
Scarce fifty-five did fly;
Of fifteen hundred Englishmen
Went home but fifty-three,
The rest were slain in Chevy Chase,
Under the greenwood tree.'

These lines, I have said, are forcible and full of spirit; but still I am glad that the genuine Northum-

brian harper knew better than to fail in respect towards such gallant adversaries, of whom he had already said,—

'Hardier men, nor of heart nor of hand,
Were not in Christianté.'

His closing picture is, I think, at once simpler and more noble in its simplicity than that of his south-country interpreter. According to him, both parties alike, after struggling on with unflinching courage throughout the long summer day, cease fighting, and that only from utter exhaustion, when the moon rises and the vesper-bell begins to sound:—

'They took off on either hand
By the light of the moon,
Many had no strength to stand
On Cheviot the hills aboone:
Of fifteen hundred archers of Inglonde
Went away but fifty and three,
Of twenty hundred spearmen of Skotlonde
But five and fifti.'

And now, before I conclude, seeing that I hold a brief for provincial poets in general on this occasion, I should like to ask you a question: Is there no other well-known lay, besides 'The Hunting of the Cheviot,' which started into life among outsiders and refugees?

no other which, though careless of historical facts, yet from the impressive truth of its characters, above all from the noble proportions and intense life of the central one, gives sufficient evidence of a basis of history beneath? no other which, though it dealt with alien traditions, and celebrated the triumphs of a clan beaten and dispossessed by Sparta, stirred, nevertheless, the heart of a Spartan Sir Philip Sidney like a trumpet? Under his auspices it insinuated itself gradually into every corner of the land — into the metropolitan cities and the remotest colonies alike. Its provincialism sloughed itself away as the serpent sloughs its skin: it became national, it became a bond of union, it became a kind of Bible to all who spoke any one of the numberless dialects of Hellas. And now this old Æolic ballad, which began its career as the Hellenic Chevy Chase of some obscure Smyrniote rhapsodist or rhapsodists, stands forth to endless generations as the poem of the world. I can easily imagine the disgust of the fashionable Court minstrels, from Argos and Mycenæ and Corinth and Lacedæmon, who thought it a stretch of condescension when they attended the festivals of meaner states, at their unexpected reception. They came to see and to conquer; but the beautiful maidens of Delos and the other Ægean isles

turned away from their brand-new Dorian hexameters to listen, delightedly, to 'that blind old fiddler from Chios, who sings about those effeminate Æolian princes and their trumpery Asiatic expedition.' Some one of them, perhaps, may have anticipated, more or less, the candour of Monsieur Falconet, who, after comparing the beauties of his own faultless model for Peter the Great's equestrian statue, with the countless defects of that inferior animal upon which Marcus Aurelius sits, an emperor for ever, above the steps of the Capitol at Rome, stopped, took a pinch of snuff, and ended his lecture thus: 'Et cependant, Messieurs, il faut avouier que cette vilaine bête est vivante, tandis que la mienne est morte.' In some such spirit, possibly, the laureate of Temenus, or the favourite rhapsode of Cresphontes, may have checked the sneers of those hangers-on and parasites by whom he was sure to be surrounded. He may have said to them,—'Nay, nay; you are too hard on the old man: there is often something fine in what he declaims; and could he correct himself of that horrible habit of dropping his h's, and of the other vulgar Ionisms which disfigure his style, I am certain that I could make something of him.' Oh, sacred but forgotten poet, I have no doubt that you could. He, however, has managed to do without you, and has made some-

thing of himself—so much, indeed, that we who are not provincial poets look upon him as the light of the past, the creator of Hellas, the bard of bards, the inexhaustible well-head—

> 'A quo, seu fonte perenni
> Vatum Pieriis ora rigantur aquis.'

But were I Mr. Barnes, Mr. Waugh, or any member of their special literary guild, I should insist upon contemplating him from a different point of view—I should claim him as my particular ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν—as the captain and patron-saint, if I may so speak, of my own poetical brotherhood; and, if ever a hostile critic were ill-advised enough to decry my pretensions by saying, 'After all, you do not write English; you are only a provincial poet,' I should reply, without hesitation, 'True, so I am; so also in his day—was Homer.'

DR. NEWMAN'S

'DREAM OF GERONTIUS.'

LECTURE III.

DR. NEWMAN'S

'DREAM OF GERONTIUS.'

A POET is not always interesting to his readers exactly in proportion to his artistic eminence. The distinction drawn by Wordsworth at the opening of the 'Excursion,' between what he calls 'the vision and the faculty divine' and what he calls the accomplishment of verse, does not apply itself only, as he applies it there, to those who write and to those who refrain altogether from writing. It enters also into our comparative estimate of certain different classes among literary men. With regard to some, we should say, that what they give to the world is, more emphatically, an exhibition of talent, of intellectual brilliancy, of pure literary power; whilst, as to others again, we cannot but feel that their efforts come upon us as suggesting something more, as

outpourings from unsounded depths within the character, as irrepressible utterances of the hidden soul.

Now, in the earlier stages of society, the true and born poet was not looked upon, I apprehend, as a literary man at all; he belonged to a race apart (ἄνευ μανίας οὐδεὶς ποιήτης), and was ranked accordingly among prophets rather than among authors; he was a favoured servant upon whom a precious burden was laid; a chosen interpreter, to whom noble messages were entrusted—messages which he was driven, under the pressure of a self-consuming enthusiasm, to communicate in music to man. But as civilisation rolled down from those august heights and clouded solitudes, where, according to the common belief of nations, her original fountain-head derived itself from God; as she flowed into a thousand circulating channels, and fertilised new ground, the arts of life gradually assumed a more practical and definite form. When this took place, the poet was, in a great degree, unmantled and discrowned—perhaps at present I ought rather to say, was disestablished and disendowed;—he had, whatever the proper phrase may be, to retire into the background. Sophists, rhetoricians, orators, and statesmen all thought that they could teach the people how to live and what to wish for, much better than solemn old gentlemen

who kept crooning their mystic hexameters, in harmony with the motions of a staff. Philosophers, in their turn, maintained that the right to bore mankind with discussions about τὸ ἓν and the pure reason, was indisputably theirs; whilst historians made it clear that the necessary twist could be given to facts more succinctly and more plausibly in prose than in verse. Poetry, therefore, though it still continued to live and to please, ceased to be that exhausting burthen, that painful wrestling with the powers of the universe, by which its earlier votaries were at once ennobled and overwhelmed. Still, however, some rays from the retiring sun-god were refracted around the image of the bard; and, even to this day, there lingers a belief, true or false, that when a poet, real, original, and unmistakeable, rises upon us, his genius, his inspiration, as we call it, is something special, something differing not in degree but in kind from any inspiration which urges on the orator, the statesman, or the mathematician. When, therefore, we turn to our present imaginative writers, who come forward as artists and creators to enchant us with the graces and varieties of a beautiful literature, a half thought crosses the mind now and then whether the harp which they have inherited retains all her original strings; whether the chord of

mystery which at first gave a tone of strange power and earnestness to the whole instrument, has not somehow or other relaxed itself, and silently mouldered away. If, then, at such moments we find in our path some lonely and single-minded searcher after wisdom,—

'Whose soul is like a star, and dwells apart,'—

if we find one for whom life is no arena upon which brilliant accomplishments may be displayed, or glittering crowns of victory arrived at—no place for easy pleasure, or even the most innocent self-indulgence, we are surprised and startled into reverence. We, perhaps, may be wasting our time in frivolous pleasures or unsubstantial pursuits; but, to him, his life has ever proved a problem which all the years of it are too short to solve—an arid desert massed up with mirages and phantoms, through which he has to struggle, in order that he may bring himself face to face with his own ideal of the truth. Such a man—and I call Dr. Newman such a man—if he writes verses, writes them because he cannot help himself; the travail of his heart must come out somehow, or else it will tear him to pieces; and in his restlessness he discovers that verse, for him, is the natural outlet of feeling. From his thoughts any idea of mere literary

success is a thousand leagues away. The subjects which he chooses are not those most susceptible of poetical embellishments. No; they are his own doubts and struggles, the glimpses of light and the oppressions of darkness which alternately cheer and sadden his unparticipated existence. To put it better than I can, he grapples, not as an imaginative exercise, but in deadly earnest with

> 'Those obstinate questionings
> Of sense, and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings,
> Blank misgivings of a creature
> Moving about in worlds not realised:
> High instincts, before which our mortal nature
> Doth tremble, like a guilty thing surprised.'

From such a man we may be as far removed in spirit and in feeling as if he were an inhabitant of the Dog-star; but still we find ourselves, whenever we meet him, in the presence of something unquestionably noble. Moreover, if we regard him as a poet, though others may delight us more, though his intellectual gifts for that particular purpose may be comparatively unimportant, still the fibre of intensity is always alive within him; and over him the sense of intercommunion with something higher and deeper than man

> 'Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave—
> A presence that is not to be put by.'

It is not wonderful, therefore, if we think sometimes that he may be united to the rapt singers and prophets of old by links of feeling, and touches of privilege, which obtain no entrance into more brilliant souls; it is not wonderful, therefore, if we pause sometimes to consider whether it be not to such as him, rather than to such as them, that we ought to look for any fragments of the lost and forgotten tune, for any last faint echoes upon earth from that primeval melody which arose in heaven when 'the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.'

Now, if the distinction I have here taken be a sound one—if Dr. Newman, by some delicate thread of connection, be affiliated to the older instincts, and the more prophetic half of the poetical character—if for him the imagination be not an intellectual plaything, not a mere musical instrument, but the appointed spiritual energy by the help of which he raises himself, at intervals, to glance over the imprisoning walls of sense and matter into the spiritual world beyond—then surely he deserves from us, as a man of high and unusual nature, the most attentive consideration.

I am not here, of course, to claim for him a literary station as high as if he were a Tennyson or a Browning; or, indeed, to deny that Tennyson, throughout his 'In

Memoriam' and elsewhere probably, is visited by that remoter and more authentic inspiration of which I have been speaking; but still, for Tennyson, as for others,—

'The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose;
The moon doth with delight
Look round her, when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth,
Albeit he know, where'er he go,
That there has passed away a glory from the earth.'

For Dr. Newman, on the other hand, the inaccessible muse Urania is almost his only patroness; from her eight earthlier sisters he gets hardly any assistance. Nay, unless I misconceive his philosophy, he scarce believes in any real rose, in any actual rainbow; the stars themselves are little more than phantom lights, visionary flashings of that great dream, woven between the soul and God, which men agree here to call for the moment our visible and material universe. Now to us, originally of coarser texture, and who have knocked about the world ever since, who have gone sessions, squabbled with attorneys as revising barristers, and done work for the Poor Law Board, much of this is almost inconceivable. The children and

champions of compromise, we undergo a sense of insignificance and degradation which creeps into the marrow of our bones when, as in the 'Apologia,' we stumble upon a man who, really and earnestly sincere, has lived always in, for, and by the spirit alone. His love of truth is so keen, so subtly keen, that the will answers to every breath of logical impulse, just as our telegraph-wires acknowledge the lightest pulsations of an electric current. We may gasp with astonishment, when we find that a casual phrase of St. Augustine's has upset, as if it were a house of cards, some cherished theory which the labour of years had gradually wrought into shape; we may smile when we perceive how simple, how child-like in many ways was that powerful mind, beneath whose sway the hearts of so many 'were moved to and fro, as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind;' but still the more we know, the more we honour the man, the more do we accept him as a strange, an abnormal, a solitary, but still as a beautiful soul. Among other matters, more important no doubt, but less within my province, if we read his poetry, we read it with affectionate respect, not so much because it is exquisite in point of art, as because it is essentially spontaneous, spiritual, and deep. A good deal of it, doubtless, awakens no echo in our

sympathies, it does not speak to us, possibly because our sense of hearing is not of the requisite compass; but we all of us, in our degree, have been vexed and harassed by inward struggles; we all of us have known the weight of darkness upon our life, and therefore we can all feel that in this prayer—this cry—for light, there is an intense reality and truth which lend to it no ordinary charm:—

THE PILLAR OF THE CLOUD.

'Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path, but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.'

I have entered upon these preliminary details, and

dwelt upon the inborn peculiarities which Dr. Newman himself has disclosed to us, because all his poems, 'Gerontius' among the rest, grow out of his whole character. They are the expressions of a nature, not the developments and elaborations of an art. It is remarkable how, more than once, in his 'Apologia,' this strange man recurs, with something like fear, to a haunting sense that all the outward aspects of matter are phantasmal and unreal: a sense which seems to have been about his path and about his bed from early childhood. I have known the same feeling, or one like it, in others. I have known men, yes, and young children also, with such an impression, seldom given out, but always on cross-examination found to be lurking at the heart. We poco-curanti who think life too short to be wasted on metaphysics, and who refute Berkeley in the style of Dr. Johnson, by kicking at a stone or a foot-ball, are apt, whenever we run up against such weird mystics, to feel dissatisfied with ourselves and every one else. We may go on furthermore to reflect (though that Buddhist creed implies the unimportance rather than the unreality of matter) how, at this very day, the absolute majority of mankind believe, under ancestral traditions beyond a date, in the transmigration of souls, and grow thereupon still hotter

and more flurried and more uncomfortable. We have even been known, for a quarter of an hour, to question whether all wisdom and all knowledge of human nature has condensed itself, as to time, within the latter half of this nineteenth century; and as to space, within some twenty streets round about Piccadilly and Pall Mall. Luckily for our peace of mind this unnatural modesty does not last long. But even when we have recovered our legitimate self-esteem, it may not be without profit to study the effect of such anomalous temperaments upon religion, upon politics, upon life. Our present business is with literature—with poetry, indeed—more especially the poetry of Dr. Newman. Now, original as he is, he cannot, any more than smaller men, escape from the conditions of his age. When he first became known, the influence of Wordsworth was perhaps at its highest; there was a surfeit of Byron; there had been a reaction from Scott; Tennyson, as yet, was below the horizon. I should therefore expect to find, as one result of Dr. Newman's scepticism with regard to matter, that he would remain comparatively unaffected by much in Wordsworth that produced a deep impression upon others. I should have previously imagined, for instance, that Dr. Newman would be somewhat hard and cold to the beauty

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and influence of the outer world. I think, upon examining this point, that these anticipations of mine are realised more or less. We all know, at any rate, what the opposite tendency—the tendency, I mean, to see life in everything, and to spiritualise for himself all the manifestations of matter—have produced for us in Wordsworth. It has indeed so informed his poetry, that in spite of a religion keen, unintermitting and profound, he has been grumbled at by sound divines as a Pantheist. Speaking, however, not as a theological but only as a poetical critic, this is a heresy, if Wordsworth were a heretic, which I cannot bring myself to regret; under that stimulus he pursues Nature as if she were his mistress, and colours every description of her with a living glow of love. Dr. Newman, on the other hand, so far as I can judge from the book which I hold here, is not much interested in what for him has but little reality, and dwells but seldom on the earthly outside of things with any warmth of personal affection. Now this, in my judgment, is a grave defect. I think a want of sensuousness in a poet (and I say so openly, because the poetry of abstract thought is not likely to be undervalued at present,) fatal to very high eminence in that department of literature. Wordsworth, it may be said, has clothed deep and

original views with enduring poetry. True; but he was enabled to do so just because he united a character peculiar in its passion, no doubt, but still intensely passionate, with a great faculty of thought:—

> 'The sounding cataract
> Haunted him like a passion; the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, had been to him
> An appetite, a feeling, and a love.'

And therefore it is that the dry bones scattered about the 'Excursion' and the 'Prelude' have had strength given them to stand up on their feet and live. Nay, without referring again to what Wordsworth says of himself, how is it that Coleridge describes the inspiration of his friend?

> An orphic song indeed,
> A song divine of high and passionate thoughts,
> To their own music chanted.'

It is this double refraction of passion and of thought, fused into one flash of blended light, which gives their life and character to his poetical diamonds; but still it is in the passion rather than in the thought, if we could but disentangle them, that we should find, I believe, the quickening spirit of the gem. Hence I think Dr. Newman in his earlier poems has suffered somewhat by assigning too much weight to Words-

worth's power of thought, without sufficiently taking into account the more poetical and less imitable qualities by which it is relieved. The same criticism may be directed with even more propriety against other esteemed writers who have enlisted, during the last thirty years, in the 'Wordsworth's own Cumberland meditators;' they may knit their brows like their illustrious colonel, but they cannot mimic 'the beatings of his heart.'

I once knew of two young ladies, both fond of poetry—both Wordsworthians to the tips of their fingers. The first had drunk in so deeply her poet's views of intercommunion with the life of the universe—views which suffered nothing to lie for him inert and dead—that in her universal sympathy she even out-Wordsworthed Wordsworth; she could not rest till she had clothed her very gowns with a personal identity and an individual character. She baptized them accordingly, as fast as they came home from her milliner, with sonorous names of heroes and of kings. Hence a girlish friend sitting with her was startled by the sudden irruption of a stern though affectionate maid: 'Now, Miss, you have gone and torn Castor, and Pollux is as dirty as the ground; you have nothing left for Sunday but old Lysander, and yet, you know, I told you over

and over again how wrong you were to leave Superbus behind.' Her rival inclined to the austerer side of the Great Man's intellect, and was found to have jotted down in her commonplace book the following awful entry: 'Resolved, for the future, to think clearly, comprehensively, and profoundly on all subjects.' This at the first aspect may appear the more noble proceeding, but I am convinced that if they intend to follow as poetesses in the steps of their master, the gownswoman of the two was in the right.

Nay, even as far as that master himself is concerned, I will make a clean breast of it, and confess that in spite of the width of thought and glow of feeling which distinguish him from his numberless imitators, I hardly look upon him as taking rank among the normal summits in the orthodox range of Parnassus, but rather as standing, with respect to such mountain brothers of song, like a peak of Teneriffe, apart, and unsympathising and alone.

To return, however, to our immediate subject. Any comparative insensibility to the beauty of nature, or to those outward aspects which stimulate the imagination of the passionate and sensuous poet, is in the 'Dream of Gerontius' of less importance. The region through which it moves is filled with the dry colourless light of

infinity, and not by those fluctuating rays which tinge our human atmosphere. I should say, therefore, that Dr. Newman, in grappling with such an awful subject as immortality and the state of the soul after death, had chosen well for himself; if such a statement did not somewhat imply that this fine poem had originated in an artistical pursuit of literary excellence, instead of springing up spontaneously out of the innermost fountains of a deeply religious mind.

However this may be, the massiveness of thought, the purity of feeling, and the austere grandeur of imagination which distinguish Dr. Newman, find here an appropriate place. In a more secular poem, I should expect that, either from the natural bias of his understanding, or perhaps from the collapse of all slighter emotions under the pressure of intense thought, a certain dryness and stiffness of style would have made themselves felt, and felt disadvantageously. Dr. Newman, however, is here dealing with high matters, fitted to call forth that deep-seated zeal and fire which always lay in the heart of his character—a zeal and fire which, in their instinctive rebellion against his preconceived plans for being calm and tranquil and reserved, often lend a subtle and peculiar charm to his writings. Besides, what I have called above an

austere imagination, that is, a faculty of which the business is to conceive and body forth great architectural wholes of thought, without frittering itself away on the details of ornamentation, is the only form of the imaginative intellect suitable to a drama so solemn as 'Gerontius;' and, in that respect, Dr. Newman is eminently strong.

And now I must ask your pardon, if I detain you at this point for a moment, by a short analysis of the poem which we are examining. I can hardly doubt that every one of you is at least as well acquainted with it as I am myself. But still, the old maxim that half the failures in love, in war, in trade, in every department of life, have as their cause the taking things for granted, claims a hearing, and must be attended to. 'Gerontius,' then, is a religious drama which describes a dying Catholic, not apparently a man of any special or exceptional holiness, but one who has struggled worthily through a long series of years, and is now before the gates of Death. He still is, as he ever has been, a dutiful and pious son of his mother Church; but his senses are shaken by pain, and by his human terror of the grave; his senses, moreover, half spiritualized as the strength of the flesh ebbs away from

them, detect on the air around and in the soul within, hostile and malignant emanations bent to poison his latest breathings, and to beat down that sacred hope which falters more and more as it approaches its fulfilment. Still he is supported against these unseen enemies by faith; and when his earthly destiny has accomplished itself, departs in peace. Immediately he finds that he is borne along by some protecting power, through sneering demons and sympathizing angels, up to the Throne of Judgment itself. The dramatic element is made up of a colloquy between him and this glorious creature to whom he has been entrusted. In order, however, to make head against the monotony which would ensue if this were all, the dialogue, as it proceeds, is from time to time relieved by the choral hymns of the seraphs whom they pass, interrupted by the malevolent utterances howled at by them by demons, who would fain impede their progress; and solemnly closes with a lyrical valediction sung by that immortal guide over the awe-stricken soul; which then is left, after having been at once cheered and blasted by a single glimpse of the Most High, to cleanse itself from those disfiguring stains which forbid its immediate entrance into heaven. Of the doctrines involved in this striking production it is unnecessary to say more

than that there is nothing, except the bare idea of purgatory (a theological and not a poetical blemish), which need prevent any Christian, or, indeed, any one who believes in the providence of God, from valuing it according to its deserts. It is built mainly upon those noble foundations which were laid eighteen hundred years ago, and which are still the common inheritance of Christendom, the common centre of our European civilization.

It is probable, indeed, that the first idea of composing such a dramatic work may have been suggested to Dr. Newman by the Autos Sacramentales of Spain, and especially by those of the illustrious Calderon; but, so far as I can learn, he has derived hardly anything from them beyond the vaguest hints, except, indeed, the all-important knowledge that a profound religious feeling can represent itself, and that effectively, in the outward form of a play. I may remark that these Spanish Autos of Calderon constitute beyond all question a very wonderful and a very original school of poetry, and I am not without hope that, when I know my business a little better, we may examine them impartially together. Nay, even as it is, Calderon stands so indisputably at the head of all Catholic religious dramatists, among whom Dr. Newman has recently

enrolled himself, that perhaps it may not be out of place to inquire for a moment into his poetical methods and aims, in order that we may then discover, if we can, how and why the disciple differs from his master. Now there is a great conflict of opinion as to the precise degree of merit which these particular Spanish dramas possess. Speaking as an ignorant man, I should say that, whilst those who disparage them seem rather hasty in their judgments, and not so well informed as could be wished, still the kind of praise which they receive from their most enthusiastic admirers puzzles and does not instruct us.

Taking, for example, the great German authority on this point, Dr. Lorinzer, as our guide, we see his poet looming dimly through a cloud of incense, which may embalm his memory, but certainly does not improve our eyesight. Indeed, according to him, any appreciation of Calderon is not to be dreamt of by a Protestant. 'Even learned critics,' says he, 'highly cultivated in all the niceties of æsthetics, are deficient in the knowledge of Catholic faith and Catholic theology without which it is impossible properly to understand Calderon.' And yet, without being Greeks we feel the Iliad, without being Parsees the Shahnamâ comes home to us, without being Mahometans the songs of Arabia quicken our

pulses with their lyrical impulse and fire; Berserker poets, Hindoo poets, even Chinese poets speak a language not unintelligible to our ears:—

'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.'

However true, therefore, these Teutonic dicta may be, we cannot be expected patiently to acquiesce in them. Dr. Lorinzer then goes on to say, 'that old traditions which twine round the dogma like a beautiful garland of legends, deeply profound thoughts expressed here and there by some of the Fathers of the Church, are made use of with *such incredible skill* and introduced *so appositely at the right place*, that (I presume) even ordinary imaginations are awakened to the charm of the poetry, even ordinary understandings roused up to enter into the depth of the thoughts.' Oh, no! I beg your pardon, I have misread the learned German. He does not finish his sentence in that way at all. What he does really say is this, 'are made use of with such incredible skill, and inserted so appositely at the right place, that —frequently it is not easy to guess the source from whence they have been derived.' The learned German's notion of incredible dramatic skill, and exquisite appositeness of introduction, seems to be that the exercise of these high faculties should leave spectator or reader, as the case may be, in hopeless perplexity and con-

fusion. According to this method of reasoning, the logical objection against Calderon ought to be taken thus, that though often most meritoriously difficult, he falls short of absolute perfection in this, that it is sometimes possible to understand his meaning. Nevertheless, these scenes so unfathomably profound, these sublime enigmas, which exact, like the handwriting on the wall, a specially inspired interpreter to decypher them, were composed in the first instance to gratify, and did gratify, the uneducated populace of Madrid. I should like to have Calderon himself up, even for half an hour, if it were only that he might criticise his critics.

At the same time, Dr. Lorinzer's knowledge of his subject is so profound, and his appreciation of his favourite author so keen, that for me, who am almost entirely unacquainted with this branch of literature, formally to oppose his views, would be an act of presumption of which I am, as I trust, incapable. I may, however, perhaps be permitted to observe, that with regard to the few pieces of this kind which in an English dress I have read, whilst I think them not only most ingenious but also surprisingly beautiful, they do not strike me as incomprehensible at all. We must accept them, of course, as coming from the

mind of a devout Catholic and Spanish gentleman who belongs to the seventeenth century; but when once that is agreed upon, there are no difficulties greater than those which we might expect to find in any system of poetry so remote from our English habits of thought. There is, for instance, the 'Divine Philothea,' in other words, our human spirit considered as the destined bride of Christ. This sacred drama, we may well call it the swan-song of Calderon's extreme old age, is steeped throughout in a serene power and a mellow beauty of style, making it not unworthy to be ranked with that Œdipus Colonæus which glorified the sunset of his illustrious predecessor; but yet, Protestant as I am, I cannot discover that it is in the least obscure. Faith, Hope, Charity, the five senses, Heresy, Judaism, Paganism, Atheism, and the like, which in inferior hands must have been mere lay figures, are there instinct with a dramatic life and energy such as beforehand I could hardly have supposed possible. Moreover, in spite of Dr. Lorinzer's odd encomiums, each allegory as it rises up is more neatly rounded off, and shows a finer grain than any of the personifications of Spenser; so that the religious effect and the theological effect intended by the writer are both amply produced—yes, produced upon us, his

heretical admirers. Hence, even if there be mysterious treasures of beauty below the surface, to which we aliens must remain blind for ever, this expression, which broke from the lips of one to whom I was eagerly reading the play, 'Why, in the original, this must be as grand as Dante,' tends to show that such merits as do come within our ken are not likely to be thrown away upon any fair-minded Protestant. Dr. Newman, as a Catholic, will have entered, I presume, more deeply still into the spirit of these extraordinary creations: his life, however, belongs to a different era, and to a colder people. And thus, however much he may have been directed to the choice of a subject by the old mysteries and moralities (of which these Spanish autos must be taken as the final development and bright consummate flower), he has treated that subject, when once undertaken by him, entirely from his own point of view. 'Gerontius' is meant to be studied and dwelt upon by the meditative reader. The autos of Calderon were got ready by perhaps the most accomplished playwright that ever lived, to amuse and stimulate a thronging southern population. 'Gerontius' is, we may perhaps say for Dr. Newman in the words of Shelley,—

'The voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought.'

whilst the conceptions of the Spanish dramatist burst into life with tumultuous music, gorgeous scenery, hurrying processions, and all the pomps and splendours of the Catholic Church. No wonder, therefore, that our English auto, though composed with the same general purpose of using verse, and dramatic verse, to promote a religious and even a theological end, should differ from them in essence as well as in form. There is room, however, for both kinds in the wide empire of Poetry, and though Dr. Newman himself would be the first to cry shame upon me if I were to name him with Calderon even for a moment, still his mystery of this most unmysterious age will, I believe, keep its honourable place in our English literature as an impressive, an attractive, and an original production.

If we proceed to examine it in detail, I think, though I speak diffidently, that the finest thing it contains is the early soliloquy of Gerontius when he finds himself, as he believes at first, alone with infinity. The whole of this speech is so real and so plausible, that we accept it at once as the natural continuation of his earthly career, and seem to feel with him that his actual position, however new and previously unimagined, has nothing in it to awaken

either surprise or confusion. I will now, with your permission, read it to you at length:—

'I went to sleep; and now I am refresh'd,
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
Of freedom, as I were at length myself,
And ne'er had been before. How still it is!
I hear no more the busy beat of time,
No, nor my fluttering breath, nor struggling pulse;
Nor does one moment differ from the next.
I had a dream; yes;—some one softly said
"He's gone;" and then a sigh went round the room.
And then I surely heard a priestly voice
Cry "Subvenite;" and they knelt in prayer.
I seem to hear him still; but thin and low,
And fainter and more faint the accents come,
As at an ever-widening interval.
Ah! whence is this? What is this severance?
This silence pours a solitariness
Into the very essence of my soul;
And the deep rest, so soothing and so sweet,
Hath something too of sternness and of pain,
For it drives back my thoughts upon their spring
By a strange introversion, and perforce
I now begin to feed upon myself,
Because I have nought else to feed upon.

Am I alive or dead? I am not dead,
But in the body still; for I possess
A sort of confidence, which clings to me,
That each particular organ holds its place
As heretofore, combining with the rest
Into one symmetry, that wraps me round,
And makes me man; and surely I could move,

Did I but will it, every part of me.
And yet I cannot to my sense bring home
By very trial, that I have the power.
'Tis strange; I cannot stir a hand or foot,
I cannot make my fingers or my lips
By mutual pressure witness each to each,
Nor by the eyelid's instantaneous stroke
Assure myself I have a body still.
Nor do I know my very attitude,
Nor if I stand, or lie, or sit, or kneel.'

The rest of the work is much in the same key as the above: it is grave and subdued as to tone, somewhat bare of ornament, but everywhere weighty with thought. It is written also with Dr. Newman's usual mastery over the English language, and moves along from the beginning to the end with a solemn harmony of its own. I am here referring to the blank verse; the speeches rather. The lyrical portions (with the exception of two, on which I shall touch by-and-by) are, in my judgment, less successful. The strains as they flow forth from the various ranks of angels are not, if I may use a somewhat pedantic word, differentiated by any intelligible gradations of feeling and of style, and, indeed, do not move me much more than those average hymns which people, who certainly are not angels yet, sing weekly in church. The interlocutory blasphemies of the demons are still worse.

I cannot help pronouncing them to be mean and repulsive.

I am aware that here there is room for a wide difference of opinion; I know that German critics of renown will tell you that the fiends of Dante or of Tasso are more to be admired than those of 'Paradise Lost.' But, though I do not wish to enter into any abstract discussions on the nature of good and evil, or on the metaphysical effects consequent on utter alienation from God, I yet feel that, poetically speaking, what they say is not true. I stand here in an English University, as an Englishman—an English Philistine, if you will—and profess myself, on that head at least, incurably Miltonic. I do not forget that another class of thinkers, very different from German critics, have arrived, by a separate road, at something like the same conclusion, and that our Miltonic Hades has been condemned by intelligent English divines. The silent valley where the lost spirits sing—

'With notes angelical to many a harp;'

the intellectual pleasures reserved for them when they reason high—

'Of fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute;'

the noble palace, for which

> 'The blazing cressets, fed
> With naphtha and asphaltus, yielded light
> As from a sky,'

are thought of, as opening avenues to something more like comparative happiness, than is consistent with the appointed prison-house of misery and sin. Excellent men, therefore, speak of such fine imaginations as dangerous and deceitful; just as if these sublime visions of our great Puritan poet had lent some colour of plausibility to the hypothetical plans of that Yankee pedlar who, on being asked, when he returned from a business tour in Texas, what kind of a place it was, is said to have replied, 'Wall, stranger, if Hell and Texas both belonged to me, *I* should sell Texas.' Now, whatever may be the moral or theological force of these objections, upon me as a poetical critic, and nothing more, they do not tell with any weight. When I look at the question from my own point of view, I think that if you degrade one who was

> 'Of the first
> If not the first Archangel,'

into an imp, you destroy, to our apprehensions, his personal identity at once; he is no longer the same being; no longer an antagonist powerful enough to

dispute with Michael; no longer the centre of the hostile system—a spiritual anti-sun, as it were, raying out that darkness which maintains to the end its fierce though unequal battle against the immeasurable light.

Nay, even if Milton had never existed, I should still consider the fiendish shapes of the 'Inferno,' who are like nothing so much as the harsh ushers and malignant young bullies of an ill-conducted private school, to be wanting altogether in dignity and effect.

I sympathise with both clauses of Wordsworth's noble line—

> 'Calm pleasures there abide, majestic pains;'

and therefore I turn away, not without a sense of relief, from Dr. Newman's gibbering devils, to the melancholy grandeur with which Byron, in his 'Heaven and Earth,' reproduces our Miltonic idea of a fallen spirit:—

> 'Son of the saved,
> When thou and thine have braved
> The wide and warring element,
> Shall thou and thine be happy? No!
> Thy new world and new race shall be of woe.
> * * * *
> And art thou not ashamed
> Thus to survive,
> And eat, and drink, and wive,
> With a base heart so far subdued and tamed
> As even to hear this wide destruction named?

Who would outlive their kind
Except the base and blind?

'There is not one who hath not left a throne
Vacant in heaven, to dwell in darkness here,
Rather than see his mates endure alone.
Go, wretch, and give
A life like thine to other wretches—live!
And when the annihilating waters roar
Above what they have done,
Envy the giant patriarchs then no more,
And scorn thy sire, as the surviving one,
Thyself for being his son.'

In justice to Dr. Newman, however, I must admit that the passage wherein the guardian angel explains to Gerontius why the hellish outcries by which they are assailed are now ineffective and contemptible, is finely conceived and vigorously expressed:—

'In thy trial-state
Thou hadst a traitor nestling close at home,
Connatural, who with the powers of hell
Was leagued, and of thy senses kept the keys,
And to that deadliest foe unlock'd thy heart.
And therefore is it, in respect of man,
Those fallen ones show so majestical.
But, when some child of grace, Angel or Saint,
Pure and upright in his integrity
Of nature, meets the demons on their raid,
They scud away as cowards from the fight.
Nay, oft hath holy hermit in his cell,
Not yet disburden'd of mortality,
Mock'd at their threats and warlike overtures;

Or, dying, when they swarm'd, like flies, around,
Defied them, and departed to his Judge.'

The two rhymed pieces which stand out from all the others as deserving of high commendation are, first, the final utterance of Gerontius after his momentary interview with the hidden power of God: it is full of a sad and yearning melody, well calculated to infuse into our hearts the lesson which Dr. Newman designed it to convey. The other lines to which I referred are those which contain the farewell of the guardian angel, who, in a strain of solemn and tender pensiveness, fitly closes the drama. It may suffice, perhaps, if I read the former of these two, which, upon the whole, I prefer:—

'Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
Told out for me.
There, motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possest
Of its Sole Peace.
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:—
Take me away,
That sooner I may rise, and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.'

I think I have now said all that I had to say about the 'Dream of Gerontius;' but perhaps I may venture to add, in conclusion, that little as I sympathise with the actual opinions, or even with the methods of reasoning which characterise Dr. Newman, it has nevertheless been a real pleasure to me to recall the days of my youth, and to feel that he deserved then, and has ever since continued to deserve, the admiring reverence with which he filled the men of my generation. He has bared his heart before the crowd, and all who will may see how true, and pure, and tender a heart it is.

There may be others whom we looked up to likewise, who have surrendered their souls to a bitterer antagonism and a more hostile zeal; who pain us, now and then, by assuming a somewhat unsympathetic demeanour—by seeming to undervalue the memories that lie behind them, and the ties which they compelled themselves to break. If such there are, it is not for us to blame them; we know too well how keen the edge of these disputes, how envenomed the spirit of these religious differences, is and ever must be; but though we blame nobody, it is still lawful for us to rejoice, that one the most eminent of his class, should not, in spite of an unwavering devotion to his new

creed, even wish to forget the years when he worked and flourished at Oxford; that by *him*, at any rate, the old influences are yet spoken of with genuine respect, the old friends with undiminished affection; that of *him*, at any rate, we may yet fairly say, in words which are hacknied no doubt, but hacknied only because they cannot be improved upon—

'Cum talis sis, utinam noster esses.'

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